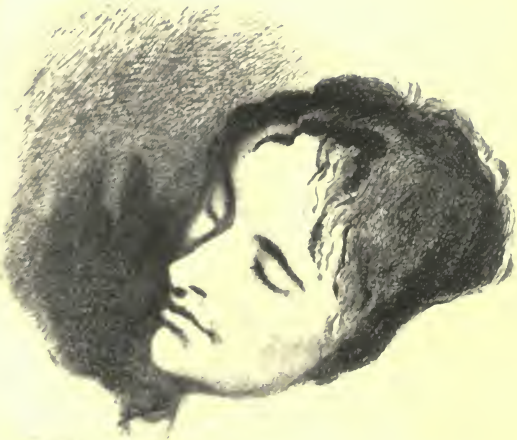
I

LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS TO FANNY BRAWNE

Where wert thou mighty Mother, when he lay,
When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies
In darkness?



LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS TO FANNY BRAWNE WRITTEN IN THE YEARS MDCCCXIX AND MDCCCXX AND NOW GIVEN FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY HARRY BUXTON FORMAN

LONDON REEVES & TURNER
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NOTE.

THERE is good reason to think that the lady to whom the following letters were addressed did not, towards the end of her life, regard their ultimate publication as unlikely; and it is by her family that they have been entrusted to the editor, to be arranged and prepared for the press.

TO JOSEPH SEVERN,

ROME.

The happy circumstance that the fifty-seventh year since you watched at the death-bed of Keats finds you still among us, makes it impossible to inscribe any other name than yours in front of these letters, intimately connected as they are with the decline of the poet's life, concerning the latter part of which you alone have full knowledge.

It cannot be but that some of the letters will give you pain,—and notably the three written when the poet's face was already turned towards that land whither you accompanied him, whence he knew there was no return for him, and where you

still live near the hallowed place of his burial. All who love Keats's memory must share such pain in the contemplation of his agony of soul. But you who love him having known, and we who love him unknown except by faith in what is written, must alike rejoice in the good hap that has preserved, for our better knowledge of his heart, these vivid and varied transcripts of his inner life during his latter years,—must alike be content to take the knowledge with such alloy of pain as the hapless turn of events rendered inevitable.

On a memorable occasion it was said of you by a great poet and prophet that, had he known of the circumstances of your unwearied attendance at the death-bed, he should have been tempted to add his "tribute of applause to the more solid recompense which the virtuous man finds

in the recollection of his own motives;" and he uttered the wish that the "unextinguished Spirit" of Keats might "plead against Oblivion" for your name. Were any such plea needed, the Spirit to prefer it, then unextinguished, is now known for inextinguishable; and whithersoever the name of "our Adonais" travels, there will yours also be found.

This opportunity may not unfitly serve to record my gratitude for your ready kindness in affording me information on various points concerning your friend's life and death, and also for the permission to engrave your solemn portraiture of the beautiful countenance seen, as you only of all men living saw it, in its final agony.

H. B. F.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE sympathetic and discerning biographer of John Keats says, in the memoir prefixed to Moxon's edition of the Poems[1], "The publication of three small volumes of verse, some earnest friendships, one profound passion, and a premature death are the main incidents here to be recorded." These words have long become "household words," at all events in the household of those who make the lives and works of English poets their special study; and nothing is likely to be discovered which shall alter the fact thus set forth.

[1] *The Poetical Works of John Keats. With a Memoir by Richard Monckton Milnes. A new Edition.* 1863 (and other dates). See p. ix, Memoir.

But that documents illustrating the fact should from time to time come to the surface, is to be expected; and the present volume portrays the "one profound passion" as perfectly as it is possible for such a passion to be portrayed without the revelation of things too sacred for even the most reverent and worshipful public gaze, while it gives considerable insight into the refinements of a nature only too keenly sensitive to pain and injury and the inherent hardness of things mundane.

The three final years of Keats's life are in all respects the fullest of vivid interest for those who, admiring the poet and loving the memory of the man, would fain form some conception of the working of those forces within him which went to the shaping of his greatest works and his greatest woes. In those three years were produced most of the compositions wherein the lover of poetry can discern the supreme hand of a master, the ultimate and

sovereign perfection beyond which, in point of quality, the poet could never have gone had he lived a hundred years, whatever he might have done in magnitude and variety; and in those years sprang up and grew the one passion of his life, sweet to him as honey in the intervals of brightness and unimpeded vigour which he enjoyed, bitter as wormwood in those times of sickness and poverty and the deepening shadow of death which we have learned to associate almost constantly with our thoughts of him.

Of certain phases of his life during these final years we have long had substantial and most fascinating records in the beautiful collection of documents entrusted to Lord Houghton, and to what admirable purpose used, all who name the name of Keats know too well to need reminding,—documents published, it is true, under certain restrictions, and subject to the depreciatory operation of asterisks and blanks of

varying significance and magnitude, proper enough, no doubt, thirty years ago, but surely now a needless affliction. But of the all-important phases in the healthy and morbid psychology of the poet connected with the over-mastering passion of his latter days, the record was necessarily scanty,—a few hints scattered through the letters written in moderately good health, and a few agonized and burning utterances wrung from him, in the despair of his soul, in those last three letters addressed to Charles Brown,—one during the sea voyage and two after the arrival of Keats and Severn in Italy.

It was with the profoundest feeling of the sacredness as well as the great importance of the record entrusted to me that I approached the letters now at length laid before the public: after reading them through, it seemed to me that I knew Keats to some extent as a different being from the Keats I had known; the features of his mind took

clearer form; and certain mental and moral characteristics not before evident made their appearance. It remained to consider whether this enhanced knowledge of so noble a soul should be confined to two or three persons, or should not rather be given to the world at large; and the decision arrived at was that the world's claim to participate in the gift of these letters was good.

The office of editor was not an arduous one so far as the text is concerned, for the letters are wholly free from anything which it seems desirable to omit; they are legibly and, except in some minute and trivial details, correctly written, leaving little to do beyond the correction of a few obvious clerical errors, and such amendment of punctuation as is invariably required by letters not written for the press. The arrangement of the series in proper sequence, however, was not nearly so simple a matter; for, except as regards the first

nine, the evidence in this behalf is almost wholly inferential and collateral ; and I have had to be content with strong probability in many cases in which it is impossible to arrive at any absolute certainty. Of the whole thirty-seven letters, not one bears the date of the year, except as furnished in the post-marks of numbers I to IX ; two only go so far as to specify in writing the day of the month, or even the month itself ; and one of these two Keats has dated a day later than the date shewn by the postmark. Those which passed through the post, numbers I to IX, are fully addressed to "Miss Brawne, Wentworth Place, Hampstead," the word "Middx." being added in the case of the six from the country, but not in that of the three from London. Numbers X to XVII and XIX to XXXII are addressed simply to "Miss Brawne"; while numbers XVIII, XXXIII, XXXIV, and XXXVI are addressed to "Mrs. Brawne," and numbers XXXV and XXXVII bear no address whatever.

These material details are not without a psychological significance: the total absence of interest in the progress of time (the sordid current time) tallies with the profound worship of things so remote as perfect beauty; and the addressing of four of the letters to Mrs. Brawne instead of Miss Brawne indicates, to my mind, not mere accident, but a sensitiveness to observation from any unaccustomed quarter: three of the letters so addressed were certainly written at Kentish Town, and would not be likely to be sent by the same hand usually employed to take those written while the poet was next door to his betrothed; the other one was, I have no doubt, sent only from one house to the other; but perhaps the usual messenger may have chanced to be out of the way.

The letters fall naturally into three groups, namely (1) those written during Keats's sojourn with Charles Armitage Brown in the Isle of Wight, and his

brief stay in lodgings in Westminster in the Summer and Autumn of 1819, (2) those written from Brown's house in Wentworth Place during Keats's illness in the early part of 1820 and sent by hand to Mrs. Brawne's house, next door, and (3) those written after he was able to leave Wentworth Place to stay with Leigh Hunt at Kentish Town, and before his departure for Italy in September, 1820. Of the order of the first and last groups there is no reasonable doubt; and, although there can be no absolute certainty in regard to the whole series of the central group, I do not think any important error will have been made in the arrangement here adopted.

The slight service to be done beside this of arranging the letters, involving a great deal of minute investigation, was simply to elucidate as far as possible by brief foot-notes references that were not self-explanatory, to give such attainable particulars of the principal persons and places concerned as are desirable by

way of illustration, and to fix as nearly as may be the chronology of that part of Keats's life at the time represented by these letters,—especially the two important dates involved. The first date is that of the passion which Keats conceived for Miss Brawne,—the second that of the rupture of a blood-vessel, marking distinctly the poet's graveward tendency,—two events probably connected with some intimacy, and concerning which it is not unnoteworthy that we should have to be making guesses at all. If these and other conjectural conclusions turn out to be inaccurate (which I do not think will be the case), they can only be proved so by the production of more documents; and if documents be produced confuting my conclusions, my aim will have been attained by two steps instead of one.

The lady to whom these letters were addressed was born on the 9th of August in the year 1800, and baptized Frances, though, as usual with bearers

of that name, she was habitually called Fanny. Her father, Mr. Samuel Brawne, a gentleman of independent means, died while she was still a child; and Mrs. Brawne then went to reside at Hampstead, with her three children, Fanny, Samuel, and Margaret. Samuel, being next in age to Fanny, was a youth going to school in 1819; and Margaret was many years younger than her sister, being in fact a child at the time of the engagement to Keats, which event took place certainly between the Autumn of 1818 and the Summer of 1819, and probably, as I find good reason to suppose, quite early in the year 1819. In the Summer of 1818 Mrs. Brawne and her children occupied the house of Charles Armitage Brown next to that of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wentworth Dilke, in Wentworth Place, Hampstead, which is not now known by that name. On Brown's return from Scotland, the Brawne's moved to another house in the neighbourhood; but they afterwards re-

turned to Wentworth Place, occupying the house of Mr. Dilke. Mr. Severn remembered that when he visited Keats during the residence of the poet with Brown, Keats used to take his visitor "next door" to call upon the Brawne family. "The house was double," wrote Mr. Severn, "and had side entrances."

It is said to have been at the house of Mr. Dilke, who was the grandfather of the present Baronet of that name, that Keats first met Miss Brawne. Mr. Dilke eventually gave up possession of his residence in Wentworth Place, and took quarters in Great Smith Street, Westminster, where he and Mrs. Dilke went to live in order that their only child, bearing his father's name, and afterwards the first Baronet, might be educated at Westminster School.

Keats's well known weakness in regard to the statement of dates leaves us without such assistance as might be expected from his general correspondence

in fixing the date of this first meeting with Miss Brawne. I learn from members of her family that it was certainly in 1818; and, as far as I can judge, it must have been in the last quarter of that year; for it seems pretty evident that he had not conceived the passion, which was his "pleasure and torment," up to the end of October, and had conceived it before Tom's death "early in December"; and, as he says in Letter III of the present series, "the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal," we must perforce regard the date of first meeting as between the end of October and the beginning of December, 1818.

In conducting the reader to this conclusion it will be necessary to remove a misapprehension which has been current for nearly thirty years in regard to a passage in the letter that yields us our starting-point. This is the long letter to George Keats, dated the 29th of October, 1818, given in Lord Houghton's

Life, Letters, &c.,[1] and commencing at page 227 of Vol. I, wherein is the following passage :

"The Misses —— are very kind to me, but they have lately displeased me much, and in this way :—now I am coming the Richardson !—On my return, the first day I called, they were in a sort of taking or bustle about a cousin of theirs, who, having fallen out with her grandpapa in a serious manner, was invited by Mrs. —— to take asylum in her house. She is an East-Indian, and ought to be her grandfather's heir. At the time I called, Mrs. —— was in conference with her up stairs, and the young ladies were warm in her praise down stairs, calling her genteel, interesting, and a thousand other pretty things, to which I gave no

[1] *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats. Edited by Richard Monckton Milnes* (Two Volumes, Moxon, 1848). My references, throughout, are to this edition; but it will be sufficient to cite it henceforth simply as *Life, Letters, &c.*, specifying the volume and page.

heed, not being partial to nine days' wonders. Now all is completely changed: they hate her, and, from what I hear, she is not without faults of a real kind; but she has others, which are more apt to make women of inferior claims hate her. She is not a Cleopatra, but is, at least, a Charmian: she has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes, and fine manners. When she comes into the room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her: from habit she thinks that *nothing particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman: the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am, at such times, too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble: I forget myself entirely, because I live in her. You will, by this time, think I am in love with her, so, before I go any further, I will

tell you I am not. She kept me awake one night, as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very 'yes' and 'no' of whose life is to me a banquet. I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket, nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her, and her like, because one has no *sensations:* what we both are is taken for granted. You will suppose I have, by this, had much talk with her—no such thing; there are the Misses —— on the look out. They think I don't admire her because I don't stare at her; they call her a flirt to me—what a want of knowledge! She walks across a room in such a manner that a man is drawn towards her with a magnetic power; this they call flirting! They do not know things; they do not know what a woman is. I believe, though, she has faults, the same as Charmian and Cleopatra might

have had. Yet she is a fine thing, speaking in a worldly way; for there are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things—the worldly, theatrical and pantomimical; and the unearthly, spiritual and ethereal. In the former, Bonaparte, Lord Byron, and this Charmian, hold the first place in our minds; in the latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and you, my dear sister, are the conquering feelings. As a man of the world, I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal being, I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me.

'I am free from men of pleasure's cares,
By dint of feelings far more deep than theirs.'

This is 'Lord Byron,' and is one of the finest things he has said."

Now it is clear from this passage that a lady had made a certain impression on Keats; and Lord Houghton in his

latest publication states explicitly what is only indicated in general terms in the Memoirs published in 1848 and 1867,—that the lady here described was Miss Brawne. In the earlier Memoirs, three letters to Rice, Woodhouse, and Reynolds follow the long letter to George Keats; then comes the statement that "the lady alluded to in the above pages inspired Keats with the passion that only ceased with his existence"; and, as the letter to Reynolds contains references to a lady, it might have been possible to regard Lord Houghton's expression as an allusion to that letter only. But in the brief and masterly Memoir prefixed to the Aldine Edition of Keats[1], his Lordship cites the passage from the letter of the 29th of October as descriptive of Miss Brawne, — thus confirming by

[1] *The Poetical Works of John Keats. Chronologically arranged and edited, with a Memoir, by Lord Houghton, D.C.L., Hon. Fellow of Trin. Coll. Cambridge* (Bell & Sons, 1876). See p. xxiii, Memoir.

explicit statement what has all along passed current as tradition in literary circles.

When Lord Houghton's inestimable volumes of 1848 were given to the world there might have been indelicacy in making too close a scrutiny into the bearings of these passages; but the time has now come when such cannot be the case; and I am enabled to give the grounds on which it is absolutely certain that the allusion here was not to Miss Brawne. As Lord Houghton has elsewhere recorded, Keats met Miss Brawne at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Dilke, who had no daughters, while the relationship of "the Misses ——" and "Mrs. ——" of the passage in question is clearly that of mother and daughters. Mrs. Brawne had already been settled with her children at Hampstead for several years at this time, whereas this cousin of "the Misses ——" had just arrived when Keats returned there from Teignmouth. The "Charmian" of this anec-

dote was an East-Indian, having a grandfather to quarrel with; while Miss Brawne never had a grandfather living during her life, and her family had not the remotest connexion with the East Indies. Moreover, Keats's sister, who is still happily alive, assures me positively that the reference is not to Miss Brawne. In regard to the blank for a surname, I had judged from various considerations internal and external that it should be filled by that of Reynolds; and, on asking Mr. Severn (without expressing any view whatever) whether he knew to whom the story related, he wrote to me that he knew the story well from Keats, and that the reference is to the Misses Reynolds, the sisters of John Hamilton Reynolds. Mr. Severn does not know the name of the cousin of these ladies.

It is clear then that the lady who had impressed Keats some little time before the 29th of October, 1818, and was still fresh in his mind, was not Fanny

Brawne. That the impression was not lasting the event shewed ; and we may safely assume that it was really limited in the way which Keats himself averred,—that he was not "in love with her." But it is incredible, almost, that, in his affectionate frankness with his brother, he would ever have written thus of another woman, had he been already enamoured of Fanny Brawne. This view is strengthened by reading the letter to the end : in such a perusal we come upon the following passage :

"Notwithstanding your happiness and your recommendations, I hope I shall never marry : though the most beautiful creature were waiting for me at the end of a journey or a walk ; though the carpet were of silk, and the curtains of the morning clouds, the chairs and sofas stuffed with cygnet's down, the food manna, the wine beyond claret, the window opening on Winandermere, I should not feel, or rather my happiness

should not be, so fine; my solitude is sublime—for, instead of what I have described, there is a sublimity to welcome me home; the roaring of the wind is my wife; and the stars through my window-panes are my children; the mighty abstract Idea of Beauty in all things, I have, stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that Beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone, than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my spirit the office which is equivalent to a King's Body-guard: 'then Tragedy with scepter'd pall comes sweeping by:' according to my state of mind, I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches, or with Theocritus in the vales of Sicily; or throw my whole being into

Troilus, and, repeating those lines, 'I wander like a lost soul upon the Stygian bank, staying for waftage,' I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate, that I am content to be alone. Those things, combined with the opinion I have formed of the generality of women, who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time, form a barrier against matrimony which I rejoice in. I have written this that you might see that I have my share of the highest pleasures of life, and that though I may choose to pass my days alone, I shall be no solitary; you see there is nothing splenetic in all this. The only thing that can ever affect me personally for more than one short passing day, is any doubt about my powers of poetry: I seldom have any, and I look with hope to the nighing time when I shall have none."[1]

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[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, pp. 234–6.

There is but little after this in the letter, and apparently no break between the time at which he thus expressed himself and that at which he signed the letter and added—"This is my birthday." If therefore my conclusion as to the negative value of this and the "Charmian" passage be correct, we may say that he was certainly not enamoured of Miss Brawne up to the 29th of October, 1818, although it is tolerably clear, from the evidence of Mr. Dilke, that Keats first met her about October or November. Again, in a highly interesting and important letter to Keats's most intimate friend John Hamilton Reynolds, a letter which Lord Houghton placed immediately after one to Woodhouse dated the 18th of December, 1818, we read the following ominous passage suggesting a doom not long to be deferred :—

"I never was in love, yet the voice and shape of a woman has haunted me

these two days—at such a time when the relief, the feverish relief of poetry, seems a much less crime. This morning poetry has conquered—I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life—I feel escaped from a new, strange, and threatening sorrow, and I am thankful for it. There is an awful warmth about my heart, like a load of Immortality.

"Poor Tom—that woman and poetry were ringing changes in my senses. Now I am, in comparison, happy."[1]

There is no date to this letter; and, although it was most reasonable to suppose that the fervid expressions used pointed to the real heroine of the poet's tragedy,—that he wrote in one of those moments of mastery of the intellect over the emotions such as he experienced when writing the extraordinary fifth Letter of the present series,—the fact is

[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, p. 240.

that the reference is to "Charmian," and that the letter was misplaced by Lord Houghton. It really belongs to September 1818, and should precede instead of following this "Charmian" letter.

When Keats wrote the next letter in Lord Houghton's series (also undated) to George and his wife, Tom was dead; and there is another clue to the date in the fact that he transcribes a letter from Miss Jane Porter dated the 4th of December, 1818. After making this transcript he proceeds to draw the following verbal portrait of a young lady:

"Shall I give you Miss ——? She is about my height, with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort; she wants sentiment in every feature; she manages to make her hair look well; her nostrils are very fine, though a little painful; her mouth is bad and good; her profile is better than her full face, which, indeed, is not full, but pale and thin, without showing any bone; her

shape is very graceful, and so are her movements ; her arms are good, her hands bad-ish, her feet tolerable. She is not seventeen, but she is ignorant ; monstrous in her behaviour, flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term—Minx : this is, I think, from no innate vice, but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly. I am, however, tired of such style, and shall decline any more of it. She had a friend to visit her lately ; you have known plenty such—she plays the music, but without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers ; she is a downright Miss, without one set-off. We hated her, and smoked her, and baited her, and, I think, drove her away. Miss ——, thinks her a paragon of fashion, and says she is the only woman in the world she would change persons with. What a stupe,—she is as superior as a rose to a dandelion."[1]

[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, pp. 252–3.

There is nothing explicit as to the date of this passage; but there is no longer any doubt that this sketch has reference to Miss Brawne, and that Keats had now found that most dangerous of objects a woman "alternating attraction and repulsion."

The lady's children assured me that the description answered to the facts in every particular except that of age: the correct expression would be "not nineteen"; but Keats was not infallible on such a point; and the holograph letter in which he wrote "Miss Brawne" in full shews that he made a mistake as to her age. When he wrote this passage, he was, I should judge, feeling a certain resentment analogous to what found a much more tender expression in the first letter of the present series, when the circumstances made increased tenderness a matter of course,—a resentment of the feeling that he was becoming enslaved.

There is no announcement of his

engagement in the original letter to his brôther and sister-in-law, which I have read; and it would seem improbable that he was engaged when he wrote it. But of the journal letter begun on the 14th of February, 1819, and finished on the 3rd of May, only a part of the holograph is accessible; and there may possibly have been such an announcement in the missing part, while, under some date between the 19th of March and the 15th of April, Keats writes the following paragraph and sonnet, from which it might be inferred that the engagement had been announced in an unpublished letter.

"I am afraid that your anxiety for me leads you to fear for the violence of my temperament, continually smothered down: for that reason, I did not intend to have sent you the following Sonnet; but look over the two last pages, and ask yourself if I have not that in me

which will bear the buffets of the world. It will be the best comment on my Sonnet; it will show you that it was written with no agony but that of ignorance, with no thirst but that of knowledge, when pushed to the point; though the first steps to it were through my human passions, they went away, and I wrote with my mind, and, perhaps, I must confess, a little bit of my heart.

Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell:
No God, no Demon of severe response,
Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell.
Then to my human heart I turn at once.
Heart! Thou and I are here sad and alone;
I say, why did I laugh? O mortal pain!
O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.
Why did I laugh? I know this Being's lease,
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed."[1]

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[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, p. 268, and Vol. II, p. 301. Should not the semicolon at *point* change places with the comma at *knowledge*?

Again in the same letter, on the 15th of April, Keats says "Brown, this morning, is writing some Spenserian stanzas against Miss B—— and me,"—a reference, doubtless, to Miss Brawne, probably indicative of the engagement being an understood thing; and, seemingly on the same date, he writes as follows:

"The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more and more; it is that one in which he meets with Paulo and Francesca. I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind, and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life; I floated about the wheeling atmosphere, as it is described, with a beautiful figure, to whose lips mine were joined, it seemed for an age; and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm; ever-flowery tree-tops sprung up, and we rested on them, sometimes with the lightness of a cloud, till the wind blew

us away again. I tried a Sonnet on it: there are fourteen lines in it, but nothing of what I felt. Oh! that I could dream it every night.

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoon'd and slept,
So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright,
So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes,
And seeing it asleep, so fled away,
Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe, where Jove grieved a day,
But to that second circle of sad Hell,
Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows,—pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm."[1]

The meaning of this dream is sufficiently clear without any light from the fact that the sonnet itself was written in a little volume given by Keats to Miss Brawne, a volume of Taylor & Hessey's miniature edition of Cary's Dante, which

[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, p. 270, and Vol. II, p. 302.

had remained up to the year 1877 in the possession of that lady's family.[1]

Although the present citation of extant documents does not avail to fix the date of Keats's passion more nearly than to shew that it almost certainly lies somewhere between the 29th of October and beginning of December, 1818, there can be little doubt that, if a competent person should be permitted to examine all the original documents concerned, the date might be ascertained much more nearly;—that is to say that the particular "first week" of acquaintance in which Keats "wrote himself the

[1] This little book, now in my collection, is of great interest. It is marked throughout for Miss Brawne's use,—according to Keats's fashion of "marking the most beautiful passages" in his books for her. At one end is written the sonnet referred to in the text, apparently composed by Keats with the book before him, as there are two "false starts," as well as erasures; and at the other end, in the handwriting of Miss Brawne, is copied Keats's last sonnet,

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art.

The Spenser similarly marked, the subject of Letter XXXIV, is missing.

vassal" of Miss Brawne, as he says (see page 13), might be identified. But in any case it must be well to bring into juxtaposition these passages bearing upon the subject of the letters now made public.

The natural inference from all we know of the matter in hand is that after his brother Tom's death, Keats's passion had more time and more temptation to feed upon itself; and that, as an unoccupied man living in the same village with the object of that passion, an avowal followed pretty speedily. It is not surprising that there are no letters to shew for the first half of the year 1819, during which Keats and Miss Brawne probably saw eachother constantly, and to judge from the expressions in Letter XI, were in the habit of walking out together.

The tone of Letter I is unsuggestive of more than a few weeks' engagement; but it is impossible, on this alone, to found safely any conclusion whatever.

From the date of that letter, the 3rd of July, 1819, we have plainer sailing for awhile: Keats appears to have remained in the Isle of Wight till the 11th or 12th of August, when he and Brown crossed from Cowes to Southampton and proceeded to Winchester. At page 19 we read under the date "9 August," "This day week we shall move to Winchester"; but in the letter bearing the postmark of the 16th (though dated the 17th) Keats says he has been in Winchester four days; so that the patience of the friends with Shanklin did not hold out for anything like a week.

At Winchester the poet remained till the 11th of September, when bad news from George Keats hurried him up to Town for a few days: he meant to have returned on the 15th, and was certainly there again by the 22nd, remaining until some day between the 1st and 10th of October, by which date he seems to have taken up his abode at lodgings in College Street, Westminster.

Here he cannot have remained long; for on the 19th he was already proposing to return to Hampstead; and it must have been very soon after this that he accepted the invitation of Brown to "domesticate with" him again at Wentworth Place; and on the 19th of the next month he was writing from that place to his friend and publisher, Taylor.[1]

This brings us to the fatal winter of 1819–20, during which, until the date of Keats's first bad illness, we should not expect any more letters to Miss Brawne, because, in the natural course of things, he would be seeing her daily.

The absence of any current record as to the exact date whereon he was struck down with that particular phase of his malady which he himself felt from the first to be fatal, must have seemed peculiarly regretworthy to Keats's lovers; but it is not impossible to deduce from the various materials at command the

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[1] See *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. II, p. 35.

day to which Lord Houghton's account refers. This well-known passage leaves us in no doubt as to the place wherein the beginning of the end came upon the poet,—the house of Charles Brown ; but the day we must seek for ourselves.

Passing over such premonitions of disease as that recorded in the letter to George Keats and his wife dated the 14th of February, 1819, and printed at page 257 of the first volume of the *Life*, namely that he had "kept in doors lately, resolved, if possible, to rid" himself of "sore throat,"—the first date important to bear in mind is Thursday, the 13th of January, 1820, which is given at the head of a somewhat remarkable version of a well-known letter addressed to Mrs. George Keats. This letter first appeared without date in the *Life;* but, on the 25th of June, 1877, it was printed in the New York *World*, with many striking variations from the previous text, and with several additions, including the date already quoted, the genuine-

ness of which I can see no reason for doubting. The letter begins thus in the *Life, Letters, &c.*—

"My dear Sister,

By the time you receive this your troubles will be over, and George have returned to you."

In *The World* it opens thus—

"My dear Sis.: By the time that you receive this your troubles will be over. I wish you knew that they were half over; I mean that George is safe in England, and in good health."

It is not my part to account here for the *verbal* inconsistency between these two versions; but the inconsistency as regards *fact*, which has been charged against them, is surely not real. Both versions alike indicate that Keats was writing with the knowledge that his letter would not reach Mrs. George

Keats till after the return of her husband from his sudden and short visit to England ; and, assuming the genuineness of another document, this was certainly the case.

In *The Philobiblion*[1] for August, 1862, was printed a fragment purporting to be from a letter of Keats's, which seems to me, on internal evidence alone, of indubitable authenticity; and, if it is Keats's, it must belong to the particular letter now under consideration. It is headed *Friday 27th*, is written in higher spirits, if anything, than the rest of this brilliant letter, giving a ludicrous string of comparisons for Mrs. George Keats's sister-in-law, Mrs. Henry Wylie, which,

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[1] *The Philobiblion a monthly Bibliographical Journal. Containing Critical Notices of, and Extracts from, Rare, Curious, and Valuable Old Books.* (Two Volumes. Geo. P. Philes & Co., 51 Nassau Street, New York. 1862–3.) The Keats letter is at p. 196 of Vol. I, side by side with one purporting to be Shelley's, a flagrant forgery which has been publicly animadverted on several times lately, having been reprinted as genuine.

together with a final joke, were apparently deemed unripe for publication in 1848, being represented by asterisks in the *Life, Letters, &c.* (Vol. II, p. 49). The fragment closes with the promise of "a close written sheet on the first of next month," varying in phrase, just as the *World* version of the whole letter varies, from Lord Houghton's.[1]

Keats explains, under the inaccurate and unexplicit date *Friday 27th*, that he has been writing a letter for George to take back to his wife, has unfortunately forgotten to bring it to town, and will have to send it on to Liverpool, whither George has departed that morn-

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1 The correspondent of *The World* would seem (I only say *seem;* for the matter is obscure) to have used Lord Houghton's pages for "copy" where a cursory examination indicated that they gave the same matter as the original letter,—transcribing what presented itself as new matter from the original. The fragment of *Friday 27th* was, on this supposition, in its place when the copies were made for Lord Houghton, because there is the close; but between that time and 1862 it must have been separated from the letter.

ing "by the coach," at six o'clock. The 27th of January, 1820, was a Thursday, not a Friday; and there can be hardly any doubt that George Keats left London on the 28th of January, 1820, because John, who professed to know nothing of the days of the month, seems generally to have known the days of the week; and this Friday cannot have been in any other month: it was after the 13th of January, and before the 16th of February, on which day Keats wrote to Rice, referring to his illness.[1] But whether the date at the head of the fragment should be *Thursday 27th* or *Friday 28th* is immaterial for our present purpose, because the Thursday after that date would be the same day in either case; and it was on the Thursday after George left London that Keats was taken ill. This appears from the following passage extracted by Sir Charles Dilke from a letter of George Keats's

[1] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. II, p. 55.

to John, and communicated to *The Athenæum* of the 4th of August, 1877 :

"Louisville, June 18th, 1820.

My dear John,

Where will our miseries end? So soon as the Thursday after I left London you were attacked with a dangerous illness, an hour after I left this for England my little girl became so ill as to approach the grave, dragging our dear George after her. You are recovered (thank [*sic*] I hear the bad and good news together), they are recovered, and yet . . . ."

Thus, it was on Thursday, the 3rd of February, 1820, that Keats, as recounted by Lord Houghton (Vol. II, pp. 53–4), returned home at about eleven o'clock, "in a state of strange physical excitement," and told Brown he had received a severe chill outside the stage-coach,—that he coughed up some blood on getting into bed, and read in its colour

his death-warrant. Mr. Severn tells me that Keats left his bed-room within a week of his being taken ill: within a fortnight, as we have seen, he was so far better as to be writing (dismally enough, it is true) to Rice; but, that he was confined to the house for some months, is evident. The whole of the letters forming the second division of the series, Numbers X to XXXII, seem to me to have been written during this confinement; and I should doubt whether Keats did much better, if any, than realize his hope of getting out for a walk on the 1st of May.

At that time he was not sufficiently recovered to accompany Brown on his second tour in Scotland; and was yet well enough by the 7th to be at Gravesend with his friend for the final parting. I understand from the *Life, Letters, &c.* (Vol. II, p. 60), that Keats then went at once to Kentish Town: Lord Houghton says "to lodge at Kentish Town, to be near his friend Leigh Hunt"; but

Hunt says in his *Autobiography* (1850), Vol. II, p. 207, "On Brown's leaving home a second time,...Keats, who was too ill to accompany him, came to reside with me, when his last and best volume of poems appeared..."[1] These accounts are not necessarily contradictory; for Keats may have tried lodgings *near* Hunt first, and moved under the same roof with his friend when the lodgings became intolerable, as those in College Street had done before. He was reading the proofs of *Lamia, Isabella, &c.* on the 11th of June, as shown by a letter to Taylor of that date;[2] and, on the 28th, appeared in *The Indicator*, beside the Sonnet

"As Hermes once took to his feathers light..."

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[1] It is interesting, by the way, to extract the following note of locality from the *Autobiography* (Vol. II, p. 230): "It was not at Hampstead that I first saw Keats. It was in York-buildings, in the New-road (No. 8), where I wrote part of the *Indicator;* and he resided with me while in Mortimer-terrace, Kentish-town (No. 13), where I concluded it."

[2] *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. II, p. 61.

the paper entitled "A Now," at the composition of which Keats is said to have been not only present but assisting ;[1] and, as Hunt wrote pretty much "from hand to mouth" for *The Indicator*, we may safely assume that Keats was with him, at all events till just the end of June. On a second attack of spitting of blood, he returned to Wentworth Place to be nursed by Mrs. and Miss Brawne ; and he was writing from there to Taylor on the 14th of August.

Between these two attacks he would seem to have written the letters forming the third series, Numbers XXXIII to XXXVII. I suspect the desperate tone of Number XXXVII had some weight in bringing about the return to Went-

[1] See Hunt's *Autobiography*, Vol. II, p. 216. It may be noted in passing that the *Indicator* version of the Sonnet varies in some slight details from the Original in the volume of Dante referred to at page xliv, and from Lord Houghton's text. It is natural to suppose that Hunt's copy was the latest of the three; and his text is certainly an improvement on the others where it varies from them.

worth Place; and that this was the last letter Keats ever wrote to Fanny Brawne; for Mr. Severn tells me that his friend was absolutely unable to write to her either on the voyage or in Italy.

There are certain passages in the letters, taking exception to Miss Brawne's behaviour, particularly with Charles Armitage Brown, which should not, I think, be read without making good allowance for the extreme sensitiveness natural to Keats, and exaggerated to the last degree by terrible misfortunes. Keats was himself endowed with such an exquisite refinement of nature, and, without being in any degree a prophet or propagandist like Shelley, was so intensely in earnest both in art and in life, that anything that smacked of trifling with the sacred passion of love must have been to him more horrible and appalling than to most persons of refinement and culture. Add to this that, for the greater part of the time

during which his good or evil hap cast him near the object of his affection, his robust spirit of endurance was disarmed by the advancing operations of disease, and his discomfiture in this behalf aggravated by material difficulties of the most galling kind; and we need not be surprised to find things that might otherwise have been deemed of small account making a violent impression upon him. In a memoir[1] of his friend Dilke, written by that gentleman's grandson, there is an extract from some letter or journal, emanating from whom, and at what date, we are not told, but probably from Mr. or Mrs. Dilke, and which is significant enough: it is at page 11:

"It is quite a settled thing between

[1] *The Papers of a Critic. Selected from the Writings of the late Charles Wentworth Dilke. With a Biographical Sketch by his Grandson, Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, Bart., M.P., &c. In Two Volumes.* (London. John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1875.) See Vol. I, p. 11.

Keats and Miss ——. God help them. It's a bad thing for them. The mother says she cannot prevent it, and that her only hope is that it will go off. He don't like anyone to look at her or to speak to her."

This indicates, at all events, a morbid susceptibility on the part of Keats as to the relations of his betrothed with the rest of the world, and must be taken into account in weighing his own words in this connexion. That things went uncomfortably enough to attract the attention of others is indicated again in an extract which Sir Charles Dilke has published on the same page with the foregoing, from a letter written to Mrs. Dilke by Miss Reynolds:

"I hear that Keats is going to Rome, which must please all his friends on every account. I sincerely hope it will benefit his health, poor fellow! His mind and spirits must be bettered by it; and

absence may probably weaken, if not break off, a connexion that has been a most unhappy one for him."

Unhappy, the connexion doubtless was, as the connexion of a doomed man with the whole world is likely to be; but it would be unfair to assume that the engagement to Miss Brawne took a more unfortunate turn than any engagement would probably take for a man circumstanced as Keats was,—a man without independent means, and debarred by ill-health from earning an independence. Above all, it would be both unsafe and extremely unfair to conclude that either Miss Brawne or Keats's amiable and admirable true friend Charles Brown was guilty of any real levity.

That Keats's passion was the cause of his death is an assumption which also should be looked at with reserve. Shelley's immortal Elegy and Byron's ribald stanzas have been yoked together to draw down the track of years the false notion that adverse criticism killed

him; and now that that form of murder has been shewn not to have been committed, there seems to be a reluctance to admit that there was no killing in the matter. Sir Charles Dilke says, at page 7 of the Memoir already cited, that Keats "'gave in' to a passion which killed him as surely as ever any man was killed by love." This may be perfectly true; for perhaps love never did kill any man; but surely it must be superfluous to assume any such dire agency in the decease of a man who had hereditary consumption. Coleridge's often-quoted verdict, "There is death in that hand," does not stand alone; and the careful reader of Keats's Life and Letters will find ample evidence of a state of health likely to lead but to one result,—such as the passage already cited in regard to his staying at home determined to rid himself of sore throat, the account of his return, invalided, from the tour in Scotland, which his friends agreed he ought never to have under-

taken, and his own statement to Mr. Dilke, printed in the *Life, Letters, &c.* (Vol. II, p. 7), that he "was not in very good health" when at Shanklin.

Lord Houghton's fine perception of character and implied fact sufficed to prevent his giving any colour to the supposition that Keats was not sufficiently cherished and considered in his latter days: the reproaches that occur in some of the present letters do not lead me to alter the impression conveyed to me on this subject by his Lordship's memoirs; nor do I doubt that others will make the necessary allowance for the fevered condition of the poet's mind and the harassed state of body and spirit. Mr. Severn tells me that Mrs. and Miss Brawne felt the keenest regret that they had not followed him and Keats to Rome; and, indeed, I understand that there was some talk of a marriage taking place before the departure. Even twenty years after Keats's death, when Mr. Severn returned to England, the

bereaved lady was unable to receive him on account of the extreme painfulness of the associations connected with him.

In Sir Charles Dilke's Memoir of his grandfather, there is a strange passage wherein he quotes from a letter of Miss Brawne's written ten years after Keats's death,—a passage which might lead to an inference very far from the truth:

"Keats died admired only by his personal friends, and by Shelley; and even ten years after his death, when the first memoir was proposed, the woman he had loved had so little belief in his poetic reputation, that she wrote to Mr. Dilke, 'The kindest act would be to let him rest for ever in the obscurity to which circumstances have condemned him.'"

That Miss Brawne should have written thus at the end of ten years' widowhood does not by any means imply

weakness of belief in Keats's fame. Obscurity of life is not identical with obscurity of works; and any one must surely perceive that an application made to her for material for a biography, or even any proposal to publish one, must have been intensely painful to her. She could not bear any discussion of him, and was, till her death in 1865, peculiarly reticent about him; but in her latter years, as a matron with grown-up children, when the world had decided that Keats was not to be left in that obscurity, she said more than once that the letters of the poet, which form the present volume, and about which she was otherwise most uncommunicative, should be carefully guarded, "as they would some day be considered of value."

It would be irrelevant to the present purpose to recount the facts of this honoured lady's life; but one or two personal traits may be recorded. She had the gift of independence or self-

sufficingness in a high degree; and it was not easy to turn her from a settled purpose. This strength of character showed itself in a noticeable manner in the great crisis of her life, and in a manner, too, that has to some extent robbed her of the small credit of devotion to the man whose love she had accepted; for those who knew the truth would not have it discussed, and those who decried her did not know the truth.

On the news of Keats's death, she cut her hair short and took to a widow's cap and mourning. She wandered about solitary, day after day, on Hampstead Heath, frequently alarming the family by staying there far into the night, and having to be sought with lanterns. Before friends and acquaintance she affected a buoyancy of spirit which has tended to wrong her memory; but her sister carried into advanced life the recollection that, when the stress of keeping up appearances passed, Fanny

spent such time as she remained at home in her own room,—into which the child would peer with awe, and see the unwedded widow poring in helpless despair over Keats's letters.

Without being in general a systematic student she was a voluminous reader in widely varying branches of literature; and some out-of-the-way subjects she followed up with great perseverance. One of her strong points of learning was the history of costume, in which she was so well read as to be able to answer any question of detail at a moment's notice. This was quite independent of individual adornment; though, *àpropos* of Keats's remark, "she manages to make her hair look well," it may be mentioned that some special pains were taken in this particular, the hair being worn in curls over the forehead, interlaced with ribands. She was an eager politician, with very strong convictions, fiery and animated in discussion; and this characteristic she preserved till the end.

The sonnet on Keats's preference for blue eyes,

"Blue! 'tis the hue of heaven," &c.,

written in reply to John Hamilton Reynolds's sonnet[1] in which a preference is expressed for dark eyes,—

"Dark eyes are dearer far
Than orbs that mock the hyacinthine bell"—

has no immediate connexion with Miss Brawne; but it is of interest to note that the colour of her eyes was blue, so that the poet was faithful to his preference. No good portrait of her is extant, except the silhouette of which a reproduction is given opposite page 3: a miniature which is perhaps no longer extant is said by her family to have been almost worthless, while the silhouette is regarded as characteristic and accurate as far as such things can be. Mr. Severn, however, told me that the

[1] This sonnet occurs at page 128 of *The Garden of Florence; and other Poems. By John Hamilton.* (London: John Warren, Old Bond-street. 1821.)

draped figure in Titian's picture of Sacred and Profane Love, in the Borghese Palace at Rome, resembled her greatly, so much so that he used to visit it frequently, and copied it, on this account. Keats, it seems, never saw this noble picture containing the only satisfactory likeness of Fanny Brawne.

The portrait of Keats which forms the frontispiece to this volume has been etched by Mr. W. B. Scott from a drawing of Severn's, to which the following words are attached :

"28th Jany. 3 o'clock mg. Drawn to keep me awake—a deadly sweat was on him all this night."

Keats's old schoolfellow, the late Charles Cowden Clarke, assured me in 1876 that this drawing was "a marvellously correct likeness."

Postscript.—During the past ten years my work in connexion with the writings and doings of Keats has involved the

discovery and examination of a great mass of documents of a more or less authoritative kind, both printed and manuscript; and many points which were matters of conjecture in 1877 are now no longer so.

Others also have busied themselves about Keats; and, since the foregoing remarks were first published in 1878, Mr. J. G. Speed, a grandson of George Keats, has identified himself with the contributor to the New York *World*, alluded to at pages xlviii and xlix, in reissuing in America Lord Houghton's edition of Keats's Poems, together with a collection of letters.[1] This work, though containing one new letter, unhappily threw no real light whatever either on the inconsistencies of text already referred to or on any other

[1] *The Letters and Poems of John Keats.* In three volumes. (Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1883). Vol. I is called *The Letters of John Keats, edited by Jno. Gilmer Speed*: Vol. II and III, *The Poems of John Keats, with the Annotations of Lord Houghton and a Memoir by Jno. Gilmer Speed.*

question connected with Keats. Later, Professor Sidney Colvin has issued, with a very different result, his volume on Keats[1] included in the "English Men of Letters" series; and I have not hesitated to use, without individual specification, such illustrative facts as have become available, whether from Mr. Colvin's work or from my own edition of Keats's whole writings,[2] which also appeared some time after the publication of the Letters to Fanny Brawne, though years before Mr. Colvin's book.

Two letters, traced since the body of the present volume passed through the press are added at the close of the series; and I have now reason to think that the letter numbered XXVIII should precede that numbered XXV, the date

[1] *Keats by Sidney Colvin.* (Macmillan & Co., 1887). Mr. Colvin has also contributed to *Macmillan's Magazine* (August, 1888) an Article *On Some Letters of Keats*, which I have also duly consulted.

[2] *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats*, (Four volumes, Reeves & Turner, 1883, considerably earlier than Mr. Speed's volumes appeared.)

being probably the 23rd or 25th of February, 1820, rather than the 4th of March as suggested in the foot-note at page 78.

The cousin of the Misses Reynolds whom Keats described as a Charmian was Miss Jane Cox,[1] at least so I was most positively assured by Miss Charlotte Reynolds in 1883.

It is now pretty clear that the intention to return to Winchester on the 14th of September, 1819, was not carried out quite literally, and that Keats really returned to that city on the 15th. In regard to the foot-note at page 33, it should now be stated that, in a letter post-marked the 16th of October, 1819, he speaks of having returned to Hampstead after lodging two or three days in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Dilke.

Having mentioned in the foot-note at page 101 that Keats had elsewhere re-

[1] Charlotte, Mr. Colvin calls her; but her name was Jane.

corded himself and Tom as firm believers in immortality, I must now state that the record cited was a garbled one. Lord Houghton, working from transcripts furnished to him by the late Mr. Jeffrey, the second husband of George Keats's widow, printed the words "I have a firm belief in immortality, and so had Tom." The corresponding sentence in the autograph letter is "I have scarce a doubt of an immortality of some kind or another, neither had Tom."

Finally, it remains to supply an omission which I find it hard to account for. In Medwin's Life of Shelley occur some important extracts about Keats, seeming to emanate from Fanny Brawne. In 1877 I learnt from the lady's family that Medwin's mysteriously introduced correspondent was no other than she. Indeed I had actually cut the relative portion of Medwin's book out for use in this Introduction; but by some inexplicable oversight I omitted even to

refer to it ; and it remained for Professor Colvin to call attention to it. I now gladly follow his lead in citing words which have a direct bearing upon the vexed question of the appreciation of Keats by her whom he loved ; and, in the appendix to the present edition, the passage in question will be found.

H. BUXTON FORMAN.

46 Marlborough Hill, St. John's Wood,
November, 1888.

CORRECTIONS.

Page xxxi, line 6 from foot, for *does* read *did*.

Page 16, end of foot-note 3, add *or perhaps a dog*.

Page 18, there should be a foot-note to the effect that *Meleager* in line 6 is written *Maleager* in the original.

Page 73, end of foot-note, strike out the words *of which period there are still indications in Letter XXVIII*.

Page 94, line 2 of note, for *in* read *on*.

Page 95, line 2 of notes, for 1819 read 1820.

Page 96, line 3 of note, for 1819 read 1820.

LETTERS

TO FANNY BRAWNE.

I TO IX.

SHANKLIN, WINCHESTER, WESTMINSTER.

I—IX.

SHANKLIN, WINCHESTER, WESTMINSTER, &c.

I.

Shanklin,
Isle of Wight, Thursday.
(Postmark, Newport, 3 [illegible], 1819.)

My dearest Lady,

I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night—Your last would like one out of Rousseau's Writings. I am more reconciled this morning. The morning is the only space I can fix on for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has

I—IX.

SHANKLIN, WINCHESTER, WESTMINSTER.

I.

Shanklin,
Isle of Wight, Thursday.

[*Postmark*, Newport, 3 July, 1819.]

My dearest Lady,

I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night—'twas too much like one out of Rousseau's Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has

closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rhapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should [think me [1]] either too unhappy or perhaps a little mad. I am now at a very pleasant Cottage window, looking onto a beautiful hilly country, with a glimpse of the sea ; the morning is very fine. I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful Coast if the remembrance of you did not weigh so upon me. I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together : the death or sickness of some one [2] has always spoilt my hours—and

[1] These two words are wanting in the original.

[2] His brother, "poor Tom," had died about seven months before the date of this letter.

now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it—make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me—write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. But however selfish I may feel, I am sure I could never act selfishly: as I told you a day or two before I left Hampstead, I will never return to London if my Fate does

not turn up Pam[1] or at least a Court-card. Though I could centre my Happiness in you, I cannot expect to engross your heart so entirely—indeed if I thought you felt as much for me as I do for you at this moment I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again tomorrow for the delight of one embrace. But no—I must live upon hope and Chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you—but what hatred shall I have for another! Some lines I read the other day are continually ringing a peal in my ears:

To see those eyes I prize above mine own
Dart favors on another—
And those sweet lips (yielding immortal nectar)
Be gently press'd by any but myself—
Think, think Francesca, what a cursed thing
It were beyond expression!

J.

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[1] Ev'n mighty Pam, that kings and queens o'erthrew,
And mow'd down armies in the fights of Loo,
Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid,
Falls undistinguish'd by the victor Spade!—
POPE'S *Rape of the Lock*, iii, 61–4.

Do write immediately. There is no Post from this Place, so you must address Post Office, Newport, Isle of Wight. I know before night I shall curse myself for having sent you so cold a Letter; yet it is better to do it as much in my senses as possible. Be as kind as the distance will permit to your

J. KEATS.

Present my Compliments to your mother, my love to Margaret[1] and best remembrances to your Brother—if you please so.

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[1] Fanny's younger sister: see Introduction.

II.

July 8th.

[*Postmark*, Newport, 10 July, 1819.]

My sweet Girl,

Your Letter gave me more delight than any thing in the world but yourself could do; indeed I am almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature stealing upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights, have I find not at all cured me of my love of Beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me: or rather breathe in that dull sort of patience that cannot be called Life. I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fancy was afraid of it,

lest it should burn me up. But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures. You mention 'horrid people' and ask me whether it depend upon them whether I see you again. Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn Mentor when I see a chance of harm befalling you. I would never see any thing but Pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and Happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of Pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexations and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own Lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain I could not. Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could

never have lov'd you?—I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its Power. You say you are afraid I shall think you do not love me—in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you. I am at the diligent use of my faculties here, I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging some rhymes; and here I must confess, that (since I am on that subject) I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and for nothing else. I have met with women whom I really think would like to be married to a Poem and to be given

away by a Novel. I have seen your Comet, and only wish it was a sign that poor Rice would get well whose illness makes him rather a melancholy companion: and the more so as so to conquer his feelings and hide them from me, with a forc'd Pun. I kiss'd your writing over in the hope you had indulg'd me by leaving a trace of honey. What was your dream? Tell it me and I will tell you the interpretation thereof.

Ever yours, my love!

JOHN KEATS.

Do not accuse me of delay—we have not here an opportunity of sending letters every day. Write speedily.

III.

Sunday Night.

[*Postmark*, 27 July, 1819.[1]]

My sweet Girl,

I hope you did not blame me much for not obeying your request of a Letter on Saturday: we have had four in our small room playing at cards night and morning leaving me no undisturb'd opportunity to write. Now Rice and Martin are gone I am at liberty. Brown to my sorrow confirms the account you give of your ill health. You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour——for what is in the world? I say you cannot conceive; it is impossible you should

[1] The word *Newport* is not stamped on this letter, as on Numbers I, II, and IV; but it is pretty evident that Keats and his friend were still at Shanklin.

look with such eyes upon me as I have upon you: it cannot be. Forgive me if I wander a little this evening, for I have been all day employ'd in a very abstract Poem and I am in deep love with you — two things which must excuse me. I have, believe me, not been an age in letting you take possession of me; the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal; but burnt the Letter as the very next time I saw you I thought you manifested some dislike to me. If you should ever feel for Man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost. Yet I should not quarrel with you, but hate myself if such a thing were to happen—only I should burst if the thing were not as fine as a Man as you are as a Woman. Perhaps I am too vehement, then fancy me on my knees, especially when I mention a part of your Letter which hurt me; you say speaking of Mr. Severn "but you must be satisfied in knowing that I admired you much more

than your friend." My dear love, I cannot believe there ever was or ever could be any thing to admire in me especially as far as sight goes—I cannot be admired, I am not a thing to be admired. You are, I love you; all I can bring you is a swooning admiration of your Beauty. I hold that place among Men which snub-nos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among women—they are trash to me—unless I should find one among them with a fire in her heart like the one that burns in mine. You absorb me in spite of myself—you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call'd being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares—yet for you I would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so. I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it

batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it. From no others would I take it. I am indeed astonish'd to find myself so careless of all charms but yours—remembering as I do the time when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest with me. What softer words can I find for you after this—what it is I will not read. Nor will I say more here, but in a Postscript answer any thing else you may have mentioned in your Letter in so many words—for I am distracted with a thousand thoughts. I will imagine you Venus tonight and pray, pray, pray to your star like a Heathen.

Your's ever, fair Star,

JOHN KEATS.

My seal is mark'd like a family table cloth with my Mother's initial F for

Fanny:[1] put between my Father's initials. You will soon hear from me again. My respectful Compliments to your Mother. Tell Margaret I'll send her a reef of best rocks and tell Sam[2] I will give him my light bay hunter if he will tie the Bishop hand and foot and pack him in a hamper and send him down for me to bathe him for his health with a Necklace of good snubby stones about his Neck.[3]

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[1] I am not aware of any other published record that this name belonged to Keats's Mother, as well as his sister and his betrothed.

[2] Samuel Brawne, the brother of Fanny: see Introduction.

[3] I am unable to obtain or suggest any explanation of the allusion made in this strange sentence. It is not, however, impossible that "the Bishop" was merely a nickname of some one in the Hampstead circle.

IV.

Shanklin, Thursday Night.

[*Postmark*, Newport, 9 August, 1819.]

My dear Girl,

You say you must not have any more such Letters as the last: I'll try that you shall not by running obstinate the other way. Indeed I have not fair play—I am not idle enough for proper downright love-letters — I leave this minute a scene in our Tragedy[1] and

[1] The Tragedy referred to is, of course, *Otho the Great*, which was composed jointly by Keats and his friend Charles Armitage Brown. For the first four acts Brown provided the characters, plot, &c., and Keats found the language; but the fifth act is wholly Keats's. See Lord Houghton's *Life, Letters, &c.* (1848), Vol. II, pp. 1 and 2, and foot-note at p. 333 of the Aldine edition of Keats's Poetical Works (Bell & Sons, 1876). A humorous account of the progress of the joint composition occurs in a letter written by Brown to Dilke, which is quoted at p. 9

see you (think it not blasphemy) through the mist of Plots, speeches, counter-plots and counterspeeches. The Lover is madder than I am—I am nothing to him—he has a figure like the Statue of Meleager and double distilled fire in his heart. Thank God for my diligence! were it not for that I should be miserable. I encourage it, and strive not to think of you—but when I have succeeded in doing so all day and as far as midnight, you return, as soon as this artificial excitement goes off, more severely from the fever I am left in. Upon my soul I cannot say what you could like me for. I do not think myself a fright any more than I do Mr. A., Mr. B., and Mr. C.—yet if I were a woman I should not like A. B. C. But enough of this. So you intend to hold me to my promise of seeing you in a short time. I shall keep it

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of the memoir prefixed by Sir Charles Dilke to *The Papers of a Critic*, referred to in the Introduction to the present volume, p. lviii.

with as much sorrow as gladness: for I am not one of the Paladins of old who liv'd upon water grass and smiles for years together. What though would I not give tonight for the gratification of my eyes alone? This day week we shall move to Winchester; for I feel the want of a Library.[1] Brown will leave me there to pay a visit to Mr. Snook at Bedhampton: in his absence I will flit to you and back. I will stay very little while, for as I am in a train of writing now I fear to disturb it—let it have its course bad or good—in it I shall try my own strength and the public pulse. At Winchester I shall get your Letters more readily; and it

[1] He did not find one; for, in a letter to B. R. Haydon, dated Winchester, 3 October, 1819, he says: "I came to this place in the hopes of meeting with a Library, but was disappointed." For this letter see *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence and Table-Talk* (Two volumes, Chatto and Windus, 1875), Vol. II, p. 16, and also Lord Houghton's *Life, Letters, &c.* (1848), Vol. II, p. 10, where there is an extract from the letter somewhat differently worded and arranged.

being a cathedral City I shall have a pleasure always a great one to me when near a Cathedral, of reading them during the service up and down the Aisle.

Friday Morning.—Just as I had written thus far last night, Brown came down in his morning coat and nightcap, saying he had been refresh'd by a good sleep and was very hungry. I left him eating and went to bed, being too tired to enter into any discussions. You would delight very greatly in the walks about here; the Cliffs, woods, hills, sands, rocks &c. about here. They are however not so fine but I shall give them a hearty good bye to exchange them for my Cathedral.—Yet again I am not so tired of Scenery as to hate Switzerland. We might spend a pleasant year at Berne or Zurich — if it should please Venus to hear my "Beseech thee to hear us O Goddess." And if she should hear, God forbid we

should what people call, *settle*—turn into a pond, a stagnant Lethe—a vile crescent, row or buildings. Better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures. Open my Mouth at the Street door like the Lion's head at Venice to receive hateful cards, letters, messages. Go out and wither at tea parties ; freeze at dinners ; bake at dances ; simmer at routs. No my love, trust yourself to me and I will find you nobler amusements, fortune favouring. I fear you will not receive this till Sunday or Monday: as the Irishman would write do not in the mean while hate me. I long to be off for Winchester, for I begin to dislike the very door-posts here —the names, the pebbles. You ask after my health, not telling me whether you are better. I am quite well. You going out is no proof that you are: how is it? Late hours will do you great harm. What fairing is it? I was alone for a couple of days while Brown went gadding over the country

with his ancient knapsack. Now I like his society as well as any Man's, yet regretted his return—it broke in upon me like a Thunderbolt. I had got in a dream among my Books—really luxuriating in a solitude and silence you alone should have disturb'd.

Your ever affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

V.

Winchester, August 17th.[1]

[*Postmark*, 16 August, 1819.]

My dear Girl—what shall I say for myself? I have been here four days and not yet written you—'tis true I have had many teasing letters of business to dismiss—and I have been in the Claws, like a serpent in an Eagle's, of the last act of our Tragedy. This is no excuse; I know it; I do not presume to offer it. I have no right either

[1] The discrepancy between the date written by Keats and that given in the postmark is curious as a comment on his statement (*Life, Letters, &c.*, 1848, Vol. I, p. 253) that he never knew the date: "It is some days since I wrote the last page, but I never know. . ."

to ask a speedy answer to let me know how lenient you are—I must remain some days in a Mist—I see you through a Mist: as I daresay you do me by this time. Believe in the first Letters I wrote you: I assure you I felt as I wrote—I could not write so now. The thousand images I have had pass through my brain—my uneasy spirits —my unguess'd fate—all spread as a veil between me and you. Remember I have had no idle leisure to brood over you—'tis well perhaps I have not. I could not have endured the throng of jealousies that used to haunt me before I had plunged so deeply into imaginary interests. I would fain, as my sails are set, sail on without an interruption for a Brace of Months longer —I am in complete cue—in the fever; and shall in these four Months do an immense deal. This Page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant—I cannot help it—I am no officer in yawning quar-

ters; no Parson-Romeo. My Mind is heap'd to the full; stuff'd like a cricket ball—if I strive to fill it more it would burst. I know the generality of women would hate me for this; that I should have so unsoften'd, so hard a Mind as to forget them; forget the brightest realities for the dull imaginations of my own Brain. But I conjure you to give it a fair thinking; and ask yourself whether 'tis not better to explain my feelings to you, than write artificial Passion.—Besides, you would see through it. It would be vain to strive to deceive you. 'Tis harsh, harsh, I know it. My heart seems now made of iron — I could not write a proper answer to an invitation to Idalia. You are my Judge: my forehead is on the ground. You seem offended at a little simple innocent childish playfulness in my last. I did not seriously mean to say that you were endeavouring to make me keep my promise. I beg your pardon for it. 'Tis but *just*

your Pride should take the alarm—*seriously*. You say I may do as I please—I do not think with any conscience I can; my cash resources are for the present stopp'd; I fear for some time. I spend no money, but it increases my debts. I have all my life thought very little of these matters—they seem not to belong to me. It may be a proud sentence; but by Heaven I am as entirely above all matters of interest as the Sun is above the Earth—and though of my own money I should be careless; of my Friends' I must be spare. You see how I go on—like so many strokes of a hammer. I cannot help it—I am impell'd, driven to it. I am not happy enough for silken Phrases, and silver sentences. I can no more use soothing words to you than if I were at this moment engaged in a charge of Cavalry. Then you will say I should not write at all.—Should I not? This Winchester is a fine place: a beautiful Cathedral and many other

ancient buildings in the Environs. The little coffin of a room at Shanklin is changed for a large room, where I can promenade at my pleasure—looks out onto a beautiful—blank side of a house. It is strange I should like it better than the view of the sea from our window at Shanklin. I began to hate the very posts there—the voice of the old Lady over the way was getting a great Plague. The Fisherman's face never altered any more than our black teapot — the knob however was knock'd off to my little relief. I am getting a great dislike of the picturesque; and can only relish it over again by seeing you enjoy it. One of the pleasantest things I have seen lately was at Cowes. The Regent in his Yatch[1] (I think they spell it) was anchored opposite — a beautiful vessel—and all the Yatchs and

[1] This word is of course left as found in the original letter: an editor who should spell it *yacht* would be guilty of representing Keats as thinking what he did not think.

and boats on the coast were passing and repassing it; and circuiting and tacking about it in every direction—I never beheld anything so silent, light, and graceful.—As we pass'd over to Southampton, there was nearly an accident. There came by a Boat well mann'd, with two naval officers at the stern. Our Bow-lines took the top of their little mast and snapped it off close by the board. Had the mast been a little stouter they would have been upset. In so trifling an event I could not help admiring our seamen — neither officer nor man in the whole Boat moved a muscle — they scarcely notic'd it even with words. Forgive me for this flint-worded Letter, and believe and see that I cannot think of you without some sort of energy—though mal à propos. Even as I leave off it seems to me that a few more moments' thought of you would uncrystallize and dissolve me. I must not give way to it —but turn to my writing again—if I

fail I shall die hard. O my love, your lips are growing sweet again to my fancy—I must forget them. Ever your affectionate

KEATS.

VI.

Fleet Street,[1] Monday Morn.

[*Postmark*, Lombard Street, 14 September, 1819.]

My dear Girl,

I have been hurried to town by a Letter from my brother George; it is not of the brightest intelligence. Am I mad or not? I came by the Friday night coach and have not yet been to Hampstead. Upon my soul it is not my fault. I cannot resolve to mix any pleasure with my days: they go one like another, undistinguishable. If I were

[1] Written, I presume, from the house of his friends and publishers, Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, No. 93, Fleet Street.

to see you today it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead, I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire. *Que feraije?* as the French novel writers say in fun, and I in earnest: really what can I do? Knowing well that my life must be passed in fatigue and trouble, I have been endeavouring to wean myself from you: for to myself alone what can be much of a misery? As far as they regard myself I can despise all events: but I cannot cease to love you. This morning I scarcely know what I am doing. I am going to Walthamstow. I shall return to Winchester tomorrow ;[1] whence you shall hear from me in a few days. I am a Coward, I cannot

[1] Whether he carried out this intention to the letter, I know not; but he would seem to have been at Winchester again, at all events, by the 22nd of September, on which day he was writing thence to Reynolds (*Life. Letters, &c.*, Vol. II, p. 23).

bear the pain of being happy: 'tis out of the question: I must admit no thought of it.

Yours ever affectionately

JOHN KEATS.

VII.

College Street.[1]

[*Postmark*, 11 October, 1819.]

My sweet Girl,

I am living today in yesterday: I was in a complete fascination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines and tell me you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday.—You dazzled me. There is nothing in the world so bright and

[1] It would seem to have been in this street that Mr. Dilke obtained for Keats the rooms which the poet asked him to find in the letter of the 1st of October, from Winchester, given at p. 16, Vol. II, of the *Life, Letters, &c.* (1848). How long Keats remained in those rooms I have been unable to determine, to a day; but in Letter No. IX he writes, eight days later, from Great Smith Street (the address of Mr. Dilke) that he purposes "living at Hampstead"; and there is a letter headed "Wentworth Place, Hampstead, 17th Nov. [1819.]" at p. 35, Vol. II, of the *Life, Letters, &c.*

delicate. When Brown came out with that seemingly true story against me last night, I felt it would be death to me if you had ever believed it—though against any one else I could muster up my obstinacy. Before I knew Brown could disprove it I was for the moment miserable. When shall we pass a day alone? I have had a thousand kisses, for which with my whole soul I thank love—but if you should deny me the thousand and first—'twould put me to the proof how great a misery I could live through. If you should ever carry your threat yesterday into execution—believe me 'tis not my pride, my vanity or any petty passion would torment me—really 'twould hurt my heart—I could not bear it. I have seen Mrs. Dilke this morning; she says she will come with me any fine day.

Ever yours

JOHN KEATS.

Ah hertè mine!

VIII.

25 College Street.

[*Postmark*, 13 October, 1819.]

My dearest Girl,

This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my Mind for ever so short a time. Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else. The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you against the unpromising morning of my Life. My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my

Life seems to stop there — I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving—I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you. My sweet Fanny, will your heart never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love..... Your note came in just here. I cannot be happier away from you. 'Tis richer than an Argosy of Pearles. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion —I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more—I could be martyr'd for my Religion—Love is my religion—I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my Love."

I can do that no more—the pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.

Yours for ever

JOHN KEATS.

IX.

Great Smith Street,

Tuesday Morn.

[*Postmark*, College Street, 19 October, 1819.]

My sweet Fanny,

On awakening from my three days dream ("I cry to dream again") I find one and another astonish'd at my idleness and thoughtlessness. I was miserable last night—the morning is always restorative. I must be busy, or try to be so. I have several things to speak to you of tomorrow morning. Mrs. Dilke I should think will tell you that I purpose living at Hampstead. I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for Love or death.

I have no Patience with any thing else—if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest, be so now—and I will—my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing.

Ever my love yours

JOHN KEATS.

X TO XXXII.

WENTWORTH PLACE.

X—XXXII.

WENTWORTH PLACE.

X.

Dearest Fanny, I shall send this the moment you return. They say I must remain confined to this room for some time. The consciousness that you love me will make a pleasant prison of the house next to yours. You must come and see me frequently: this evening, without fail—when you must not mind about my speaking in a low tone for I am ordered to do so though I *can* speak out.

Yours ever

sweetest love.—

J. KEATS.

turn over

Perhaps your Mother is not at home and so you must wait till she comes. You must see me tonight and let me hear you promise to come tomorrow.

Brown told me you were all out. I have been looking for the stage the whole afternoon. Had I known this I could not have remain'd so silent all day.

XI.

My dearest Girl,

If illness makes such an agreeable variety in the manner of your eyes I should wish you sometimes to be ill. I wish I had read your note before you went last night that I might have assured you how far I was from suspecting any coldness. You had a just right to be a little silent to one who speaks so plainly to you. You must believe—you shall, you will—that I can do nothing, say nothing, think nothing of you but what has its spring in the Love which has so long been my pleasure and torment. On the night I was taken ill—when so violent a rush of blood came to my Lungs that I felt nearly suffocated—I assure you I felt it possible I might not survive, and at

that moment thought of nothing but you. When I said to Brown "this is unfortunate"[1] I thought of you. 'Tis true that since the first two or three days other subjects have entered my head.[2] I shall be looking forward to Health and the Spring and a regular routine of our old Walks.

Your affectionate

J. K.

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[1] It may be that consideration for his correspondent induced this moderation of speech: presumably the scene here referred to is that so graphically given in Lord Houghton's *Life* (Vol. II, pp. 53-4), where we read, not that he merely "felt it possible" he "might not survive," but that he said to his friend, "I know the colour of that blood,—it is arterial blood—I cannot be deceived in that colour; that drop is my death-warrant. I must die."

[2] This sentence indicates the lapse of perhaps about a week from the 3rd of February, 1820.

XII.

My sweet love, I shall wait patiently till tomorrow before I see you, and in the mean time, if there is any need of such a thing, assure you by your Beauty, that whenever I have at any time written on a certain unpleasant subject, it has been with your welfare impress'd upon my mind. How hurt I should have been had you ever acceded to what is, notwithstanding, very reasonable! How much the more do I love you from the general result! In my present state of Health I feel too much separated from you and could almost speak to you in the words of Lorenzo's Ghost to Isabella

" Your Beauty grows upon me and I feel
A greater love through all my essence steal."

My greatest torment since I have known

you has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid; but that suspicion I dismiss utterly and remain happy in the surety of your Love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight. Send me the words 'Good night' to put under my pillow.

Dearest Fanny,

Your affectionate

J. K.

XIII.

My dearest Girl,

According to all appearances I am to be separated from you as much as possible. How I shall be able to bear it, or whether it will not be worse than your presence now and then, I cannot tell. I must be patient, and in the mean time you must think of it as little as possible. Let me not longer detain you from going to Town—there may be no end to this imprisoning of you. Perhaps you had better not come before tomorrow evening: send me however without fail a good night.

You know our situation——what hope is there if I should be recovered ever so soon—my very health will not suffer me to make any great exertion. I am recommended not even to read

poetry, much less write it. I wish I had even a little hope. I cannot say forget me—but I would mention that there are impossibilities in the world. No more of this. I am not strong enough to be weaned—take no notice of it in your good night.

Happen what may I shall ever be my dearest Love

Your affectionate

J. K.

XIV.

My dearest Girl, how could it ever have been my wish to forget you? how could I have said such a thing? The utmost stretch my mind has been capable of was to endeavour to forget you for your own sake seeing what a chance there was of my remaining in a precarious state of health. I would have borne it as I would bear death if fate was in that humour: but I should as soon think of choosing to die as to part from you. Believe too my Love that our friends think and speak for the best, and if their best is not our best it is not their fault. When I am better I will speak with you at large on these subjects, if there is any occasion — I think there is none. I am rather nervous today perhaps from being a little recovered and suffering my mind to

take little excursions beyond the doors and windows. I take it for a good sign, but as it must not be encouraged you had better delay seeing me till to-morrow. Do not take the trouble of writing much: merely send me my good night.

Remember me to your Mother and Margaret.

Your affectionate

J. K.

XV.

My dearest Fanny,

Then all we have to do is to be patient. Whatever violence I may sometimes do myself by hinting at what would appear to any one but ourselves a matter of necessity, I do not think I could bear any approach of a thought of losing you. I slept well last night, but cannot say that I improve very fast. I shall expect you tomorrow, for it is certainly better that I should see you seldom. Let me have your good night.

Your affectionate

J. K.

XVI.

My dearest Fanny,

I read your note in bed last night, and that might be the reason of my sleeping so much better. I think Mr Brown[1] is right in supposing you may stop too long with me, so very nervous as I am. Send me every evening a written Good night. If you come for a few minutes about six it may be the best time. Should you ever fancy me too low-spirited I must warn you to ascribe it to the medicine I am at present taking which is of a nerve-shaking nature. I shall impute any depression I may experience to this

[1] This coupling of Brown's name with ideas of Fanny's absence or presence seems to be a curiously faint indication of a painful phase of feeling more fully developed in the sequel. See Letters XXI, XXIV, XXVI, XXXV, and XXXVII.

cause. I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the Quill: I have mended it and still it is very much inclin'd to make blind es. However these last lines are in a much better style of penmanship, thof a little disfigured by the smear of black currant jelly; which has made a little mark on one of the pages of Brown's Ben Jonson, the very best book he has. I have lick'd it but it remains very purple. I did not know whether to say purple or blue so in the mixture of the thought wrote purplue which may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring. Be very careful of open doors and windows and going without your duffle grey. God bless you Love!

J. KEATS.

P.S. I am sitting in the back room. Remember me to your Mother.

XVII.

My dear Fanny,

Do not let your mother suppose that you hurt me by writing at night. For some reason or other your last night's note was not so treasureable as former ones. I would fain that you call me *Love* still. To see you happy and in high spirits is a great consolation to me—still let me believe that you are not half so happy as my restoration would make you. I am nervous, I own, and may think myself worse than I really am; if so you must indulge me, and pamper with that sort of tenderness you have manifested towards me in different Letters. My

sweet creature when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffer'd for you from the day I left you to go to the Isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have pass'd some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the Beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently. When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you! Even if I was well——I must make myself as good a Philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake I have found other thoughts intrude upon me. "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory —but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." Thoughts like these came very

feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you—now you divide with this (may *I* say it?) "last infirmity of noble minds" all my reflection.

God bless you, Love.

J. KEATS.

XVIII.

My dearest Girl,

You spoke of having been unwell in your last note: have you recover'd? That note has been a great delight to me. I am stronger than I was: the Doctors say there is very little the matter with me, but I cannot believe them till the weight and tightness of my Chest is mitigated. I will not indulge or pain myself by complaining of my long separation from you. God alone knows whether I am destined to taste of happiness with you: at all events I myself know thus much, that I consider it no mean Happiness to have lov'd you thus far—if it is to be no further I shall not be unthankful—if I am to recover, the day of my recovery

shall see me by your side from which nothing shall separate me. If well you are the only medicine that can keep me so. Perhaps, aye surely, I am writing in too depress'd a state of mind—ask your Mother to come and see me—she will bring you a better account than mine.

Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

XIX.

My dearest Girl,

Indeed I will not deceive you with respect to my Health. This is the fact as far as I know. I have been confined three weeks[1] and am not yet well — this proves that there is something wrong about me which my constitution will either conquer or give way to. Let us hope for the best. Do you hear the Thrush singing over the field? I think it is a sign of mild weather—so much the better for me. Like all Sinners now I am ill I philosophize, aye out of my attachment to every thing, Trees, flowers, Thrushes, Spring, Summer, Claret, &c. &c.—aye

[1] If we are to take these words literally, this letter brings us to the 24th of February, 1820, adopting the 3rd of February as the day on which Keats broke a blood-vessel.

every thing but you.—My sister would be glad of my company a little longer. That Thrush is a fine fellow. I hope he was fortunate in his choice this year. Do not send any more of my Books home. I have a great pleasure in the thought of you looking on them.

Ever yours

my sweet Fanny

J. K.

XX.

My dearest Girl,

I continue much the same as usual, I think a little better. My spirits are better also, and consequently I am more resign'd to my confinement. I dare not think of you much or write much to you. Remember me to all.

Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

XXI.

My dear Fanny,

I think you had better not make any long stay with me when Mr. Brown is at home. Whenever he goes out you may bring your work. You will have a pleasant walk today. I shall see you pass. I shall follow you with my eyes over the Heath. Will you come towards evening instead of before dinner? When you are gone, 'tis past—if you do not come till the evening I have something to look forward to all day. Come round to my window for a moment when you have read this. Thank your Mother, for the preserves, for me. The raspberry will be too sweet not having any acid; therefore as you are so good a girl I shall make you a present of it. Good bye

My sweet Love!

J. KEATS.

XXII.

My dearest Fanny,

The power of your benediction is of not so weak a nature as to pass from the ring in four and twenty hours— it is like a sacred Chalice once consecrated and ever consecrate. I shall kiss your name and mine where your Lips have been— Lips! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things? Thank God, though I hold them the dearest pleasures in the universe, I have a consolation independent of them in the certainty of your affection. I could write a song in the style of Tom Moore's Pathetic about Memory if that would be any relief to me. No—'twould not. I will be as obstinate as a Robin, I will not sing in

a cage. Health is my expected heaven and you are the Houri——this word I believe is both singular and plural—if only plural, never mind—you are a thousand of them.

Ever yours affectionately

my dearest,

J. K.

You had better not come to day.

XXIII.

My dearest Love,

You must not stop so long in the cold—I have been suspecting that window to be open.—Your note half-cured me. When I want some more oranges I will tell you—these are just à propos. I am kept from food so feel rather weak—otherwise very well. Pray do not stop so long upstairs—it makes me uneasy—come every now and then and stop a half minute. Remember me to your Mother.

Your ever affectionate

J. KEATS.

XXIV.

Sweetest Fanny,

You fear, sometimes, I do not love you so much as you wish? My dear Girl I love you ever and ever and without reserve. The more I have known the more have I lov'd. In every way—even my jealousies have been agonies of Love, in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I have vex'd you too much. But for Love! Can I help it? You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefullest. When you pass'd my window home yesterday, I was fill'd with as much admiration as if I had then seen you

for the first time. You uttered a half complaint once that I only lov'd your beauty. Have I nothing else then to love in you but that? Do not I see a heart naturally furnish'd with wings imprison itself with me? No ill prospect has been able to turn your thoughts a moment from me. This perhaps should be as much a subject of sorrow as joy—but I will not talk of that. Even if you did not love me I could not help an entire devotion to you: how much more deeply then must I feel for you knowing you love me. My Mind has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my Mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you. When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of window: you always concentrate my whole senses. The anxiety shown about our Loves in your last note is an immense pleasure to me:

however you must not suffer such speculations to molest you any more: nor will I any more believe you can have the least pique against me. Brown is gone out—but here is Mrs. Wylie[1]—when she is gone I shall be awake for you.—Remembrances to your Mother.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

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[1] George Keats's Mother-in-law. The significant *but* indicates that the absence of Brown was still, as was natural, more or less a condition of the presence of Miss Brawne. That Keats had, however, or thought he had, some reason for this condition, beyond the mere delicacy of lovers, is dimly shadowed by the cold *My dear Fanny* with which in Letter XXI the condition was first expressly prescribed, and more than shadowed by the agonized expression of a morbid sensibility in Letters XXXV and XXXVII. Probably a man in sound health would have found the cause trivial enough.

XXV.

My dear Fanny,

I am much better this morning than I was a week ago: indeed I improve a little every day. I rely upon taking a walk with you upon the first of May: in the mean time undergoing a babylonish captivity I shall not be jew enough to hang up my harp upon a willow, but rather endeavour to clear up my arrears in versifying, and with returning health begin upon something new: pursuant to which resolution it will be necessary to have my or rather Taylor's manuscript,[1] which you, if you please, will send by my Messenger either today or tomorrow. Is Mr.

[1] The MS. of *Lamia, Isabella, &c.* (the volume containing *Hyperion*, and most of Keats's finest work).

D.[1] with you today? You appeared very much fatigued last night: you must look a little brighter this morning. I shall not suffer my little girl ever to be obscured like glass breath'd upon, but always bright as it is her *nature to.* Feeding upon sham victuals and sitting by the fire will completely annul me. I have no need of an enchanted wax figure to duplicate me, for I am melting in my proper person before the fire. If you meet with anything better (worse) than common in your Magazines let me see it.

Good bye my sweetest Girl.

J. K.

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[1] I presume the reference is to Mr. Dilke.

XXVI.

My dearest Fanny, whenever you know me to be alone, come, no matter what day. Why will you go out this weather? I shall not fatigue myself with writing too much I promise you. Brown says I am getting stouter.[1] I

[1] This statement and a general similarity of tone induce the belief that this letter and the preceding one were written about the same time as one to Mr. Dilke, given by Lord Houghton (in the *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. II, p. 57), as bearing the postmark, "Hampstead, March 4, 1820." In that letter Keats cites his friend Brown as having said that he had "picked up a little flesh," and he refers to his "being under an interdict with respect to animal food, living upon pseudo-victuals,"—just as in Letter XXV he speaks to Miss Brawne of his "feeding upon sham victuals." In the letter to Dilke he says: "If I can keep off inflammation for the next six weeks, I trust I shall do very well." In Letter XXV he expresses to Miss Brawne the hope that he may go out for a walk with her on the 1st of May. If these correspondences may be trusted, we are now dealing with letters of the first week in March, of which period there are still indications in Letter XXVIII.

rest well and from last night do not remember any thing horrid in my dream, which is a capital symptom, for any organic derangement always occasions a Phantasmagoria. It will be a nice idle amusement to hunt after a motto for my Book which I will have if lucky enough to hit upon a fit one—not intending to write a preface. I fear I am too late with my note—you are gone out—you will be as cold as a topsail in a north latitude—I advise you to furl yourself and come in a doors.

Good bye Love.

J. K.

XXVII.

My dearest Fanny, I slept well last night and am no worse this morning for it. Day by day if I am not deceived I get a more unrestrain'd use of my Chest. The nearer a racer gets to the Goal the more his anxiety becomes; so I lingering upon the borders of health feel my impatience increase. Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms—the difference is amazing Love. Death must come at last; Man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I fain would try what more pleasures than you have given, so sweet a creature as you can give. Let me have another opportunity of

years before me and I will not die without being remember'd. Take care of yourself dear that we may both be well in the Summer. I do not at all fatigue myself with writing, having merely to put a line or two here and there, a Task which would worry a stout state of the body and mind, but which just suits me as I can do no more.

Your affectionate

J. K.

XXVIII.

My dearest Fanny,

I had a better night last night than I have had since my attack, and this morning I am the same as when you saw me. I have been turning over two volumes of Letters written between Rousseau and two Ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the Ladies and gentlemen of those days were so clever, and which is still prevalent among Ladies of this Country who live in a state of reasoning romance. The likeness however only extends to the mannerism, not to the dexterity. What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! What would his Ladies have said! I don't care much

—I would sooner have Shakspeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime Petticoats. One calls herself Clara and her friend Julia, two of Rosseau's heroines—they all [*sic*, but qy. *at*] the same time christen poor Jean Jacques St. Preux—who is the pure cavalier of his famous novel. Thank God I am born in England with our own great Men before my eyes. Thank God that you are fair and can love me without being Letter-written and sentimentaliz'd into it.—Mr. Barry Cornwall has sent me another Book, his first, with a polite note.[1] I must do what I can to make

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[1] The reference to Barry Cornwall and the cold weather indicate that this letter was written about the 4th of March, 1820; for in the letter to Mr. Dilke, with the Hampstead postmark of that date, already referred to (see page 73), Keats recounts this same affair of the books evidently as a quite recent trans-

him sensible of the esteem I have for his kindness. If this north east would take a turn it would be so much the better for me. Good bye, my love, my dear love, my beauty—

love me for ever.

J. K.

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action, and says he "shall not expect Mrs. Dilke at Hampstead next week unless the weather changes for the warmer."

XXIX.

My dearest Fanny,

Though I shall see you in so short a time I cannot forbear sending you a few lines. You say I did not give you yesterday a minute account of my health. Today I have left off the Medicine which I took to keep the pulse down and I find I can do very well without it, which is a very favourable sign, as it shows there is no inflammation remaining. You think I may be wearied at night you say: it is my best time; I am at my best about eight o'Clock. I received a Note from Mr. Procter[1] today. He says he cannot pay me a visit this weather as he is fearful of an inflammation in the Chest.

[1] Misspelt *Proctor* in the original.

What a horrid climate this is? or what careless inhabitants it has? You are one of them. My dear girl do not make a joke of it: do not expose yourself to the cold. There's the Thrush again—I can't afford it—he'll run me up a pretty Bill for Music—besides he ought to know I deal at Clementi's. How can you bear so long an imprisonment at Hampstead? I shall always remember it with all the gusto that a monopolizing carle should. I could build an Altar to you for it.

Your affectionate

J. K.

XXX.

My dearest Girl,

As, from the last part of my note you must see how gratified I have been by your remaining at home, you might perhaps conceive that I was equally bias'd the other way by your going to Town, I cannot be easy to-night without telling you you would be wrong to suppose so. Though I am pleased with the one, I am not displeased with the other. How do I dare to write in this manner about my pleasures and displeasures? I will tho' whilst I am an invalid, in spite of you. Good night, Love!

J. K.

XXXI.

My dearest Girl,

In consequence of our company I suppose I shall not see you before tomorrow. I am much better today —indeed all I have to complain of is want of strength and a little tightness in the Chest. I envied Sam's walk with you today; which I will not do again as I may get very tired of envying. I imagine you now sitting in your new black dress which I like so much and if I were a little less selfish and more enthusiastic I should run round and surprise you with a knock at the door. I fear I am too prudent for a dying kind of Lover. Yet, there is a great difference between going off in warm blood like Romeo, and making

one's exit like a frog in a frost. I had nothing particular to say today, but not intending that there shall be any interruption to our correspondence (which at some future time I propose offering to Murray) I write something. God bless you my sweet Love! Illness is a long lane, but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible.

J. K.

XXXII.

Dear Girl,

Yesterday you must have thought me worse than I really was. I assure you there was nothing but regret at being obliged to forego an embrace which has so many times been the highest gust of my Life. I would not care for health without it. Sam would not come in — I wanted merely to ask him how you were this morning. When one is not quite well we turn for relief to those we love: this is no weakness of spirit in me: you know when in health I thought of nothing but you; when I shall again be so it will be the same. Brown has been mentioning to me that some hint from Sam, last night,

occasions him some uneasiness. He whispered something to you concerning Brown and old Mr. Dilke[1] which had the complexion of being something derogatory to the former. It was connected with an anxiety about Mr. D. Sr's death and an anxiety to set out for Chichester. These sort of hints point out their own solution: one cannot pretend to a delicate ignorance on the subject: you understand the whole matter. If any one, my sweet Love, has misrepresented, to you, to your Mother or Sam, any circumstances which are at all likely, at a tenth remove, to create suspicions among people who from their own interested notions slander others, pray

[1] It is of no real consequence what had been said about "old Mr. Dilke," the grandfather of the first baronet and the father of Keats's acquaintance; but it is to be noted that this curious letter might have been a little more self-explanatory, had it not been mutilated. The lower half of the second leaf has been cut off,—by whom, the owners can only conjecture.

tell me: for I feel the least attaint on the disinterested character of Brown very deeply. Perhaps Reynolds or some other of my friends may come towards evening, therefore you may choose whether you will come to see me early today before or after dinner as you may think fit. Remember me to your Mother and tell her to drag you to me if you show the least reluctance—

* * * * *

XXXIII to XXXVII.

KENTISH TOWN—
PREPARING FOR ITALY.

XXXIII—XXXVII.

KENTISH TOWN—PREPARING FOR ITALY.

XXXIII.

My dearest Girl,

I endeavour to make myself as patient as possible. Hunt amuses me very kindly—besides I have your ring on my finger and your flowers on the table. I shall not expect to see you yet because it would be so much pain to part with you again. When the Books you want come you shall have them. I am very well this afternoon. My dearest...

[Signature cut off.[1]]

[1] The piece cut off the original letter is in this instance so small that nothing can be wanting except the signature,—probably given to an autograph-collector.

XXXIV.

Tuesday Afternoon.

My dearest Fanny,

For this Week past I have been employed in marking the most beautiful passages in Spenser, intending it for you, and comforting myself in being somehow occupied to give you however small a pleasure. It has lightened my time very much. I am much better. God bless you.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

XXXV.

Wednesday Morning.

My dearest Fanny,

I have been a walk this morning with a book in my hand, but as usual I have been occupied with nothing but you: I wish I could say in an agreeable manner. I am tormented day and night. They talk of my going to Italy. 'Tis certain I shall never recover if I am to be so long separate from you: yet with all this devotion to you I cannot persuade myself into any confidence of you. Past experience connected with the fact of my long separation from you gives me agonies which are scarcely to be talked of. When your mother comes I shall be very sudden and

expert in asking her whether you have been to Mrs. Dilke's, for she might say no to make me easy. I am literally worn to death, which seems my only recourse. I cannot forget what has pass'd. What? nothing with a man of the world, but to me deathful. I will get rid of this as much as possible. When you were in the habit of flirting with Brown you would have left off, could your own heart have felt one half of one pang mine did. Brown is a good sort of Man—he did not know he was doing me to death by inches. I feel the effect of every one of those hours in my side now; and for that cause, though he has done me many services, though I know his love and friendship for me, though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his assistance, I will never see or speak to him[1] until we are both old men, if we

[1] This extreme bitterness of feeling must have supervened, one would think, in increased bodily disease; for the letter was clearly written after the

are to be. I *will* resent my heart having been made a football. You will call this madness. I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years—you have amusements—your mind is away—you have not brooded over one idea as I have, and how should you? You are to me an object intensely desirable—the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you—no—you can wait—you have a thousand activities—you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you pass'd this month?[1] Who have you smil'd with? All this may seem savage

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parting of Keats and Brown at Gravesend, which took place on the 7th of May, 1819, and on which occasion there is every reason to think that the friends were undivided in attachment. I imagine Keats would gladly have seen Brown within a week of this time had there been any opportunity.

[1] This question may perhaps be fairly taken to indicate the lapse of a month from the time when Keats left the house at Hampstead next door to Miss

in me. You do not feel as I do—you do not know what it is to love—one day you may—your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in Loneliness. For myself I have been a Martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forc'd from me by the torture. I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered—if you have not—if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you—I do not want to live—if you have done so I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you, and not only you but *chaste you; virtuous you.* The Sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclination

Brawne's, at which he probably knew her employments well enough from day to day. If so, the time would be about the first week in June, 1819.

to a certain extent—you have no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day.—Be serious! Love is not a plaything—and again do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience. I would sooner die for want of you than——

Yours for ever

J. KEATS.

XXXVI.

My dearest Fanny,

My head is puzzled this morning, and I scarce know what I shall say though I am full of a hundred things. 'Tis certain I would rather be writing to you this morning, notwithstanding the alloy of grief in such an occupation, than enjoy any other pleasure, with health to boot, unconnected with you. Upon my soul I have loved you to the extreme. I wish you could know the Tenderness with which I continually brood over your different aspects of countenance, action and dress. I see you come down in the morning: I see you meet me at the Window—I see every thing over again eternally that I ever have seen. If I get on the pleasant

clue I live in a sort of happy misery, if on the unpleasant 'tis miserable misery. You complain of my illtreating you in word, thought and deed—I am sorry,—at times I feel bitterly sorry that I ever made you unhappy—my excuse is that those words have been wrung from me by the sharpness of my feelings. At all events and in any case I have been wrong; could I believe that I did it without any cause, I should be the most sincere of Penitents. I could give way to my repentant feelings now, I could recant all my suspicions, I could mingle with you heart and Soul though absent, were it not for some parts of your Letters. Do you suppose it possible I could ever leave you? You know what I think of myself and what of you. You know that I should feel how much it was my loss and how little yours. My friends laugh at you! I know some of them—when I know them all I shall never think of them again as friends or even acquaintance. My

friends have behaved well to me in every instance but one, and there they have become tattlers, and inquisitors into my conduct: spying upon a secret I would rather die than share it with any body's confidence. For this I cannot wish them well, I care not to see any of them again. If I am the Theme, I will not be the Friend of idle Gossips. Good gods what a shame it is our Loves should be so put into the microscope of a Coterie. Their laughs should not affect you (I may perhaps give you reasons some day for these laughs, for I suspect a few people to hate me well enough, *for reasons I know of*, who have pretented a great friendship for me) when in competition with one, who if he never should see you again would make you the Saint of his memory. These Laughers, who do not like you, who envy you for your Beauty, who would have God-bless'd me from you for ever: who were plying me with disencouragements with respect to you eternally.

People are revengful — do not mind them—do nothing but love me—if I knew that for certain life and health will in such event be a heaven, and death itself will be less painful. I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here—how short is the longest Life. I wish to believe in immortality [1]—I wish to live with you for ever. Do not let my name ever pass between you and those laughers; if I have no other merit than the great Love for you, that were sufficient to keep me sacred and unmentioned in such society. If I have been cruel and unjust I swear my love

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[1] He was seemingly in a different phase of belief from that in which the death of his brother Tom found him. At that time he recorded that he and Tom both firmly believed in immortality. See *Life, Letters, &c.*, Vol. I, p. 246. A further indication of his having shifted from the moorings of orthodoxy may be found in the expression in Letter XXXV, "I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in :"—not "*we* believe in."

has ever been greater than my cruelty which last [*sic*] but a minute whereas my Love come what will shall last for ever. If concession to me has hurt your Pride God knows I have had little pride in my heart when thinking of you. Your name never passes my Lips—do not let mine pass yours. Those People do not like me. After reading my Letter you even then wish to see me. I am strong enough to walk over—but I dare not. I shall feel so much pain in parting with you again. My dearest love, I am afraid to see you ; I am strong, but not strong enough to see you. Will my arm be ever round you again, and if so shall I be obliged to leave you again ? My sweet Love ! I am happy whilst I believe your first Letter. Let me be but certain that you are mine heart and soul, and I could die more happily than I could otherwise live. If you think me cruel—if you think I have sleighted you—do muse it over again and see into my heart. My love to you is "true

as truth's simplicity and simpler than the infancy of truth" as I think I once said before. How could I sleight you? How threaten to leave you? not in the spirit of a Threat to you—no—but in the spirit of Wretchedness in myself. My fairest, my delicious, my angel Fanny! do not believe me such a vulgar fellow. I will be as patient in illness and as believing in Love as I am able.

Yours for ever my dearest

JOHN KEATS.

XXXVII.

I do not write this till the last, that no eye may catch it.[1]

My dearest Girl,

I wish you could invent some means to make me at all happy without you. Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you; every thing else tastes like chaff in my Mouth. I feel it almost impossible to go to Italy—the fact is I cannot leave you, and shall never taste one minute's content until it pleases chance to let me live with you

[1] This seems to mean that he wrote the letter to the end, and then filled in the words *My dearest Girl*, left out lest any one coming near him should chance to see them. These words are written more heavily than the beginning of the letter, and indicate a state of pen corresponding with that shown by the words *God bless you* at the end.

for good. But I will not go on at this rate. A person in health as you are can have no conception of the horrors that nerves and a temper like mine go through. What Island do your friends propose retiring to? I should be happy to go with you there alone, but in company I should object to it; the backbitings and jealousies of new colonists who have nothing else to amuse themselves, is unbearable. Mr. Dilke came to see me yesterday, and gave me a very great deal more pain than pleasure. I shall never be able any more to endure the society of any of those who used to meet at Elm Cottage and Wentworth Place. The last two years taste like brass upon my Palate. If I cannot live with you I will live alone. I do not think my health will improve much while I am separated from you. For all this I am averse to seeing you—I cannot bear flashes of light and return into my gloom again. I am not so unhappy

now as I should be if I had seen you yesterday. To be happy with you seems such an impossibility! it requires a luckier Star than mine! it will never be. I enclose a passage from one of your letters which I want you to alter a little—I want (if you will have it so) the matter express'd less coldly to me. If my health would bear it, I could write a Poem which I have in my head, which would be a consolation for people in such a situation as mine. I would show some one in Love as I am, with a person living in such Liberty as you do. Shakespeare always sums up matters in the most sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such Misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia "Go to a Nunnery, go, go!" Indeed I should like to give up the matter at once—I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men, and women more. I see nothing but thorns for the future—wherever I may be next winter, in Italy

or nowhere, Brown will be living near you with his indecencies. I see no prospect of any rest. Suppose me in Rome—well, I should there see you as in a magic glass going to and from town at all hours,———— Iwish you could infuse a little confidence of human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any—the world is too brutal for me—I am glad there is such a thing as the grave—I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. At any rate I will indulge myself by never seeing any more Dilke or Brown or any of their Friends. I wish I was either in your arms full of faith or that a Thunder bolt would strike me.

God bless you.

J. K.

ADDITIONAL LETTERS.

ADDITIONAL LETTERS.

II *bis.*

Shanklin
Thursday Evening
[15 July 1819?[1]]

My love,

I have been in so irritable a state of health these two or three last days, that I did not think I should be able to write this week. Not that I was so ill, but so much so as only to be capable of an unhealthy teasing letter. To night I am greatly recovered only to

[1] This letter appears to belong between those of the 8th and 25th of July, 1819; and of the two Thursdays between these dates it seems likelier that the 15th would be the one than that the letter should have been written so near the 25th as on the 22nd. The original having been mislaid, I have not been able to take the evidence of the postmark. It will be noticed that at the close he speaks of a weekly exchange of letters with Miss Brawne; and by placing this letter at the 15th this programme is pretty nearly realized so far as Keats's letters from the Isle of Wight are concerned.

feel the languor I have felt after you touched with ardency. You say you perhaps might have made me better: you would then have made me worse: now you could quite effect a cure: What fee my sweet Physician would I not give you to do so. Do not call it folly, when I tell you I took your letter last night to bed with me. In the morning I found your name on the sealing wax obliterated. I was startled at the bad omen till I recollected that it must have happened in my dreams, and they you know fall out by contraries. You must have found out by this time I am a little given to bode ill like the raven; it is my misfortune not my fault; it has proceeded from the general tenor of the circumstances of my life, and rendered every event suspicious. However I will no more trouble either you or myself with sad prophecies; though so far I am pleased at it as it has given me opportunity to love your disinterestedness towards me.

I can be a raven no more; you and pleasure take possession of me at the same moment. I am afraid you have been unwell. If through me illness have touched you (but it must be with a very gentle hand) I must be selfish enough to feel a little glad at it. Will you forgive me this? I have been reading lately an oriental tale of a very beautiful color[1]—It is of a city of melancholy men, all made so by this circumstance. Through a series of adventures each one of them by turns reach some gardens of Paradise where they meet

[1] The story in question is one of the many derivatives from the Third Calender's Story in *The Thousand and One Nights* and the somewhat similar tale of "The Man who laughed not," included in the Notes to Lane's *Arabian Nights* and in the text of Payne's magnificent version of the complete work. I am indebted to Dr. Reinhold Köhler, Librarian of the Grand-ducal Library of Weimar, for identifying the particular variant referred to by Keats as the "Histoire de la Corbeille," in the *Nouveaux Contes Orientaux* of the Comte de Caylus. Mr. Morris's beautiful poem "The Man who never laughed again," in *The Earthly Paradise*, has familiarized to English readers one variant of the legend.

with a most enchanting Lady ; and just as they are going to embrace her, she bids them shut their eyes—they shut them—and on opening their eyes again find themselves descending to the earth in a magic basket. The remembrance of this Lady and their delights lost beyond all recovery render them melancholy ever after. How I applied this to you, my dear ; how I palpitated at it ; how the certainty that you were in the same world with myself, and though as beautiful, not so talismanic as that Lady ; how I could not bear you should be so you must believe because I swear it by yourself. I cannot say when I shall get a volume ready. I have three or four stories half done, but as I cannot write for the mere sake of the press, I am obliged to let them progress or lie still as my fancy chooses. By Christmas perhaps they may appear,[1] but I am

[1] It will of course be remembered that no such collection appeared until the following summer, when the *Lamia* volume was published.

not yet sure they ever will. 'Twill be no matter, for Poems are as common as newspapers and I do not see why it is a greater crime in me than in another to let the verses of an half-fledged brain tumble into the reading-rooms and drawing-room windows. Rice has been better lately than usual: he is not suffering from any neglect of his parents who have for some years been able to appreciate him better than they did in his first youth, and are now devoted to his comfort. Tomorrow I shall, if my health continues to improve during the night, take a look fa[r]ther about the country, and spy at the parties about here who come hunting after the picturesque like beagles. It is astonishing how they raven down scenery like children do sweetmeats. The wondrous Chine here is a very great Lion: I wish I had as many guineas as there have been spy-glasses in it. I have been, I cannot tell why, in capital spirits this last hour. What reason? When I have

to take my candle and retire to a lonely room, without the thought as I fall asleep, of seeing you tomorrow morning? or the next day, or the next—it takes on the appearance of impossibility and eternity—I will say a month—I will say I will see you in a month at most, though no one but yourself should see me; if it be but for an hour. I should not like to be so near you as London without being continually with you: after having once more kissed you Sweet I would rather be here alone at my task than in the bustle and hateful literary chitchat. Meantime you must write to me—as I will every week—for your letters keep me alive. My sweet Girl I cannot speak my love for you. Good night! and

Ever yours

JOHN KEATS.

XXXIV *bis.*

Tuesday Morn.

My dearest Girl,

I wrote a letter[1] for you yesterday expecting to have seen your mother. I shall be selfish enough to send it though I know it may give you a little pain, because I wish you to see how unhappy I am for love of you, and endeavour as much as I can to entice you to give up your whole heart to me whose whole existence hangs upon you. You could not step or move an eyelid but it would shoot to my heart—I am greedy of you. Do not think of anything but me. Do not live as if I was not existing. Do not forget me—

[1] I do not find in the present series any letter which I can regard as the particular one referred to in the opening sentence. If Letter XXXV (p. 93) were headed *Tuesday* and this *Wednesday*, that might well be the peccant document which appears to be missing.

But have I any right to say you forget me? Perhaps you think of me all day. Have I any right to wish you to be unhappy for me? You would forgive me for wishing it if you knew the extreme passion I have that you should love me —and for you to love me as I do you, you must think of no one but me, much less write that sentence. Yesterday and this morning I have been haunted with a sweet vision—I have seen you the whole time in your shepherdess dress. How my senses have ached at it! How my heart has been devoted to it! How my eyes have been full of tears at it! I[n]deed I think a real love is enough to occupy the widest heart. Your going to town alone when I heard of it was a shock to me—yet I expected it—*promise me you will not for some time till I get better.* Promise me this and fill the paper full of the most endearing names. If you cannot do so with good will, do my love tell me—say what you think—confess if your heart is too much

fasten'd on the world. Perhaps then I may see you at a greater distance, I may not be able to appropriate you so closely to myself. Were you to loose a favourite bird from the cage, how would your eyes ache after it as long as it was in sight; when out of sight you would recover a little. Perhaps if you would, if so it is, confess to me how many things are necessary to you besides me, I might be happier; by being less tantaliz'd. Well may you exclaim, how selfish, how cruel not to let me enjoy my youth! to wish me to be unhappy. You must be so if you love me. Upon my soul I can be contented with nothing else. If you would really what is call'd enjoy yourself at a Party—if you can smile in people's faces, and wish them to admire you *now*—you never have nor ever will love me. I see *life* in nothing but the certainty of your Love —convince me of it my sweetest. If I am not somehow convinced I shall die of agony. If we love we must not live

as other men and women do—I cannot brook the wolfsbane of fashion and foppery and tattle—you must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you. I do not pretend to say that I have more feeling than my fellows, but I wish you seriously to look over my letters kind and unkind and consider whether the person who wrote them can be able to endure much longer the agonies and uncertainties which you are so peculiarly made to create. My recovery of bodily health will be of no benefit to me if you are not mine when I am well. For God's sake save me—or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you. Again God bless you.

J. K.

No—my sweet Fanny—I am wrong—I do not wish you to be unhappy—and yet I do, I must while there is so sweet a Beauty—my loveliest, my darling! good bye! I kiss you—O the torments!

APPENDIX.

I.

FANNY BRAWNE'S ESTIMATE OF KEATS.

In discussing the effect which the *Quarterly Review* article had on Keats, Medwin[1] quotes the following passages from a communication addressed to him by Fanny Brawne after her marriage:—

"I did not know Keats at the time the review appeared. It was published, if I remember rightly, in June, 1818.[2] However great his mortification might have been, he was not, I should say, of a character likely to have displayed it in the manner mentioned in Mrs. Shelley's Remains of her husband. Keats, soon after the appearance of the review in question, started on a walking expedition into the Highlands. From thence he was forced to return, in consequence of the illness of a brother, whose death a few months afterwards affected him strongly.

"It was about this time that I became acquainted with Keats. We met frequently at the house of a mutual friend, (not Leigh Hunt's), but neither then nor afterwards did I see anything in his manner to give the idea that he was brooding over any secret

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1 *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. In Two Volumes.* London: 1847 (see Vol. II, pp. 86–93).

2 It appeared in No. XXXVII, headed "April, 1818," on page 1, but described on the wrapper as "published in September, 1818."

grief or disappointment. His conversation was in the highest degree interesting, and his spirits good, excepting at moments when anxiety regarding his brother's health dejected them. His own illness, that commenced in January 1820,[1] began from inflammation in the lungs, from cold. In coughing, he ruptured a blood-vessel. An hereditary tendency to consumption was aggravated by the excessive susceptibility of his temperament, for I never see those often quoted lines of Dryden without thinking how exactly they applied to Keats :—

> The fiery soul, that working out its way,
> Fretted the pigmy body to decay.

From the commencement of his malady he was forbidden to write a line of poetry,[2] and his failing health, joined to the uncertainty of his prospects, often threw him into deep melancholy.

"The letter, p. 295 of Shelley's Remains, from Mr. Finch, seems calculated to give a very false idea of Keats. That his sensibility was most acute, is true, and his passions were very strong, but not violent, if by that term violence of temper is implied. His was no doubt susceptible, but his anger seemed rather to turn on himself than on others, and in moments of greatest irritation, it was only by a sort of savage despondency that he sometimes grieved and wounded his friends. Violence such as the letter describes, was quite foreign to his nature. For more than a twelvemonth before quitting England, I saw him every day, often witnessed his sufferings, both mental and bodily, and I do not hesitate to say that he never could have addressed an unkind expression, much less a violent

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[1] See p. liii : it was the 3rd of February, 1820.
[2] See Letter XIII, pp. 49–50.

one, to any human being. During the last few months before leaving his native country, his mind underwent a fierce conflict; for whatever in moments of grief or disappointment he might say or think, his most ardent desire was to live to redeem his name from the obloquy cast upon it;[1] nor was it till he knew his death inevitable, that he eagerly wished to die. Mr. Finch's letter goes on to say—'Keats might be judged insane,'—I believe the fever that consumed him, might have brought on a temporary species of delirium that made his friend Mr. Severn's task a painful one."

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[1] See Letter XVII, pp. 57–8.

II.

THE LOCALITY OF WENTWORTH PLACE.

THE precise locality of Wentworth Place, Hampstead, has been a matter of uncertainty and dispute; and I found even the children of the lady to whom the foregoing letters were addressed without any exact knowledge on the subject. The houses which went to make up Wentworth Place were those inhabited respectively by the Dilke family, the Brawne family, and Charles Armitage Brown; but these were not three houses as might be supposed, the fact being that Mrs. Brawne rented first Brown's house during his absence with Keats in the summer of 1818, and then Dilke's when the latter removed to Westminster.

At page 98 of the late Mr. Howitt's *Northern Heights of London*,[1] it is said of Keats:—

"From this time till 1820, when he left—in the last stage of consumption—for Italy, he resided principally at Hampstead. During most of this time, he lived with his very dear friend Mr. Charles Brown, a Russia merchant, at Wentworth Place, Downshire Hill, by

[1] *The Northern Heights of London or Historical Associations of Hampstead, Highgate, Muswell Hill, Hornsey, and Islington. By William Howitt, author of 'Visits to Remarkable Places.'* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1869.)

Pond Street, Hampstead. Previously, he and his brother Thomas had occupied apartments at the next house to Mr. Brown's, at a Mrs. ——'s whose name his biographers have carefully omitted. With the daughter of this lady Keats was deeply in love—a passion which deepened to the last."

No authority is given for the statement that John and Tom Keats lodged with the mother of the lady to whom John was attached; and I think it must have arisen from a misapprehension of something communicated to Mr. Howitt, perhaps in such ambiguous terms as every investigator has experienced in his time. At all events I must contradict the statement positively; nor is there any doubt where the brothers did lodge, namely in Well Walk, with the family of the local postman, Benjamin Bentley. Charles Cowden Clarke mentions in his Recollections that the lodging was "in the first or second house on the right hand, going up to the Heath"; and the rate books show that Bentley was rated from 1814 to 1824 for the house which, in 1838, was numbered 1, the house next to the public house formerly called the "Green Man," but now known as the "Wells" Tavern. At page 102, Mr. Howitt says:—

"It is to be regretted that Wentworth Place, where Keats lodged, and wrote some of his finest poetry, either no longer exists or no longer bears that name. At the bottom of John Street, on the left hand in descending, is a villa called Wentworth House; but no Wentworth Place exists between Downshire Hill and Pond Street, the locality assigned to it. I made the most rigorous search in that quarter, inquiring of the tradesmen daily supplying the houses there, and of two residents of forty and fifty years. None of them had

any knowledge or recollection of a Wentworth Place. Possibly Keats's friend, Mr. Brown, lived at Wentworth House, and that the three cottages standing in a line with it and facing South-End Road, but at a little distance from the road in a garden, might then bear the name of Wentworth Place. The end cottage would then, as stated in the lines of Keats, be next door to Mr. Brown's. These cottages still have apartments to let, and in all other respects accord with the assigned locality."

Mr. Howitt seems to have meant that Wentworth House *with* the cottages may possibly have borne the name of Wentworth Place; and he should have said that the house was on the *right* hand in descending John Street. But the fact of the case is correctly stated in Mr. Thorne's *Handbook to the Environs of London*,[1] Part I, page 291, where a bolder and more explicit localization is given:

"The House in which he [Keats] lodged for the greater part of the time, then called Wentworth Place, is now called Lawn Bank, and is the end house but one on the rt. side of John Street, next Wentworth House."

Mr. Thorne adduces no authority for the statement; and it must be assumed that it is based on some of the private communications which he acknowledges generally in his preface. He may possibly have been biassed by the plane-tree which Mr. Howitt, at page

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[1] *Handbook to the Environs of London, Alphabetically Arranged, containing an account of every town and village, and of all the places of interest, within a circle of twenty miles round London. By James Thorne, F.S.A. In Two Parts.* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1876.)

101 of *Northern Heights*, substitutes for the traditional plum-tree in quoting Lord Houghton's account of the composition of the *Ode to a Nightingale*. Certainly there is a fine old plane-tree in front of the house at Lawn Bank; and there is a local tradition of a nightingale and a poet connected with that tree; but this dim tradition may be merely a misty repetition, from mouth to mouth, of Mr. Howitt's extract from Lord Houghton's volumes. *Primâ facie*, a plane-tree might seem to be a very much more likely shelter than a plum-tree for Keats to have chosen to place his chair beneath; and yet one would think that, had Mr. Howitt purposely substituted the plane-tree for the plum-tree, it would have been because he found it by the house which he supposed to be Brown's. This however is not the case; and it should also be mentioned that at the western end of Lawn Bank, among some shrubs &c., there is an old and dilapidated plum-tree which grows so as to form a kind of leafy roof.

Eleven years ago, when I attempted to identify Wentworth Place beyond a doubt by local and other enquiries, the gardener at Wentworth House assured me very positively that, some fifteen or twenty years before, when Lawn Bank (then called Lawn Cottage) was in bad repair, and the rain had washed nearly all the colour off the front, he used to read the words "Wentworth Place," painted in large letters beside the top window at the extreme left of the old part of the house as one faces it; and I have since had the pleasure of reading the words there myself; for the colour got washed thin enough again some time afterwards. After a great deal of enquiry among older inhabitants of Hampstead than this gardener, I found

a musician, born there in 1801, and resident there ever since, a most intelligent and clear-headed man, who had been in the habit of playing at various houses in Hampstead from the year 1812 onwards. When asked, simply and without any "leading" remark, what he could tell about a group of houses formerly known as Wentworth Place, he replied without hesitation that Lawn Bank, when he was a youth, certainly bore that name, that it was two houses, with entrances at the sides, in one of which he played as early as 1824, and that subsequently the two houses were converted into one, at very great expense, to form a residence for Miss Chester,[1] who called the place Lawn Cottage. This informant did not remember the names of the persons occupying the two houses. A surgeon of repute, among the oldest inhabitants of Hampstead, told me, as an absolute certainty, that he was there as early as 1827, knew the Brawne family, and attended them professionally at Wentworth Place, in the house forming the western half of Lawn Bank. Of Charles Brown, however, this gentleman had no knowledge.

Not perfectly satisfied with the local evidence, I forwarded to Mr. Severn a sketch-plan of the immediate locality, in order that he might identify the houses in which he visited Keats and Brown and the Brawne family: he replied that it was in Lawn Bank that Brown and Mrs. Brawne had their respective residences; and he also mentioned side entrances; but Sir Charles Dilke says his grandfather's house

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[1] She first appeared upon the London boards in 1822, and afterwards became "Private Reader" to George IV.

had the entrance in front, and only Brown's had a side entrance. Two relatives of Mrs. Brawne's who were still living in 1877, and were formerly residents in the house, also identified this block as that in which she resided, and so did the late Mr. William Dilke of Chichester, by whose instructions, during the absence of his brother, the name was first painted upon the house. It is hard to see what further evidence can be wanted on the subject. The recollection of one person may readily be distrusted; but where so many memories converge in one result, their evidence must be accepted; and I leave these details on record here, mainly on the ground that doubts may possibly arise again. At present it does not seem as if there could be any possible question that, in Lawn Bank, we have the immortalized Wentworth Place where Keats spent so much time, first as co-inmate with Brown in the eastern half of the block, and at last when he went to be nursed by Mrs. and Miss Brawne in the western half.

It should perhaps be pointed out, in regard to Mr. Thorne's expression that Keats *lodged* there, that this was not a case of lodging in the ordinary sense: he was a sharing inmate; and his share of the expenses was duly acquitted, as recorded by Mr. Dilke. In the hope of identifying the houses by some documentary evidence, I had the parish rate-books searched; in these there is no mention of John Street; but that part of Hampstead is described as the Lower Heath Quarter: no names of houses are given; and the only evidence to the purpose is that, among the ratepayers of the Lower Heath Quarter, very few in number, were Charles Wentworth Dilk (without the final *e*) and Charles Brown. The name of Mrs.

Brawne does not appear; but, as she rented the house in Wentworth Place of Mr. Dilke, it may perhaps be assumed that it was he who paid the rates.

It will perhaps be thought that the steps of the enquiry in this matter are somewhat "prolixly set forth"; and the only plea in mitigation to be offered is that, without evidence, those who really care to know the facts of the case could hardly be satisfied.

THE END.